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ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XIV.

Published Every
Week.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., February 8, 1882.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

No. 172

THE BLACK PIRATE; or, THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLDEN FETTERS.

A ROMANCE OF THE LAST DAYS OF PIRACY.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "THE DARE DEVIL,"
"THE CRETAN ROVER," "THE PIRATE PRINCE," ETC., ETC.



"GOOD GOD! IT IS THE GALLOWES SHIP! BACK WATER FOR YOUR LIVES, MEN, OR WE ARE DOOMED!"

The Black Pirate;

OR,

The Mystery of the Golden Fetters.

A Romance of the Fast Days of Piracy.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "THE MAD
MARINER," "WILD BILL," ETC.

PROLOGUE.

THE DEATH-SHIP.

NIGHT upon the Atlantic, and not a single star visible above to cast its twinkling light down into the black waters.

No wind-lashed waves, no hurricane sweeping over the limitless expanse to try the nerve of brave seamen who may be abroad upon the waters, but only a silence like unto death, darkness that was tangible, inky clouds rolling along the face of the heavens and casting deeper shadows upon the sea, while the swell rises and falls like the heaving of Nature's bosom in vast breathings.

No night-bird is abroad upon tireless wing, no white sail is in sight, only the solitude of the calm and mighty deep, which seems to wait with bated breath the breaking of those storm-clouds hovering above it and the fury of the mad winds enveloped in the funereal veils of the marching tempest, which seem to sweep the very waters as they skurry along.

Hark!

Out of the gloom suddenly breaks a wild cry, and yet no vessel is in sight.

"Help! Water! water! for the love of God, give me water, or I shall go mad!"

A cry for water and an ocean beneath the one whose pleading is thus shrieked forth in the stillness and gloom.

"Oh, God, have mercy! I am dying for one drop of water to quench this hellish thirst!"

Again did the cry burst forth, and a deep voice answered in stern command, and all was still once more.

But only for an instant the dread stillness, and then came the steady dip of oars, the click, click in the row locks, and now upon the top of the mighty, rippleless swell, now down between the watery hills, comes a boat in view.

The steady movement of the oars showed that disciplined seamen held them in hand, and there were eight of them, keeping up a long, monotonous, though not strong stroke.

Shooting into sight came the long, black man-of-war's boat, and besides the rowers there were five other forms visible, one in the bow, and leaning far over as he gazed into the gloom ahead, striving to penetrate its blackness.

One man sat at the helm, upon which his hand seemed to rest mechanically, and three others crouched down in the bottom of the boat in an attitude of hopeless despair, or of bitter suffering.

"Sail ho! sail ho! now for water to quench my burning tongue!"

"Sail ho! I say, for yonder comes a brave vessel to give us aid, to give us food, and to give us icy, crystal water."

At the wild cry from the man bending over the bow the oarsmen at once stopped rowing and turned their heads eagerly to glance for the coming vessel, while the three crouching forms all looked up with anxious, hopeful cries.

"Resume your oars, men, for it is but a fancy of his mad brain," came the stern order of the man at the helm, and once more, with steady rise and fall, the oars began their work, while the three crouching beings again dropped their heads, and from their lips came groans of despair.

But eagerly the hunger-maddened look-out in the bows kept his gaze peering into the gloom ahead, until, with a groan, he seemed to realize that there was no sail in sight, only one conjured up in his heated imagination.

"Oh, God! it is no sail, and we are lost! lost! lost!"

The cry seemed wrung from his inmost heart, and he sunk down upon his knees and buried his face in his hands, the stroke and splash of oars alone breaking the deathlike stillness.

Suddenly springing to his feet the thirst-crazed look-out shrieked forth:

"Ho, captain! do you not know that there is no hope for us?"

"See! we are thirteen! ay, thirteen, that ill-omened number, and one must die, and then help will come."

Again the oars ceased their steady movement, and a thrill of horror seemed to fall upon all.

"Yes, thirteen!"

Nearly every voice had spoken the words and the eyes of each read the faces of the others.

"One must die!"

It was the man in the bow that spoke, and a chorus of voices echoed:

"Yes, one must die!"

No one before had noticed the unlucky number in the boat, which the cunning brain of the madman had discovered, and upon him they now looked with almost savage eyes.

He read their thoughts, and cried, hastily:

"Here, let us decide who shall be the one to die, and decide by lot."

"No! hurl him into the sea, for he is mad already," cried an oarsman, and his comrades half-sprung to their feet, as though to carry out the cruel proposition.

"Hold!"

All recognized that stern voice, and beheld the tall form of the helmsman standing upright, a pistol in either hand.

"Resume your oars, men, or I will lessen the number without lot."

They seemed to know him, and sunk back without a word upon their seats.

As they arose the man in the bow had crouched down in mortal terror, although through the long night he had been praying for death, yet shrunk from it when near at hand.

"Come, I have here twelve pieces of silver and one of gold; let all draw from the captain's hat, and the one who gets the gold must die," he said, eagerly, as soon as he saw that he was safe from attack.

"So shall it be, men," said the helmsman, whom the madman had called captain, and, taking the twelve pieces of silver and the one of gold, he threw them into his hat, and after mixing them well, said, sternly:

"Draw!"

The madman, who had crept aft, thrust his hand in first, and drawing it out, a burst of demoniacal laughter rung over the dark waters as he saw that he held in his hand a piece of silver.

There was a low curse from the oarsmen at this luck of the madman's, and then one by one all drew their lots.

And from each lip escaped a cry of joy as each hand drew forth a piece of silver.

At last but two remained to draw, and one of these, an oarsman, thrust in his trembling hand, clutched one of the two pieces in the hat, and fell half-fainting in the bottom of the boat, as he saw that he, too, had escaped.

"Men, the gold piece is left, and the lot of death has fallen to me."

"So be it, I shall not murmur."

It was the captain who spoke, and in his stern, deep voice there was no sign of tremor, and the hand that held the fatal piece of gold was as firm as iron.

A groan escaped from every lip when it was seen who held the death-lot, while suddenly came in ringing tones from the madman:

"No, no! you shall not die, for I will take your place!"

With a burst of laughter upon his lips he sprang into the dark waters and sunk from the sight of his terrified companions.

Eagerly they gazed down into the black depths, and long they watched and waited in breathless silence.

But no form came to the surface to catch their eyes, no voice was heard off on the waters, no splash of a drowning man, and, almost like guilty wretches, they huddled together, no lip profaning the deathlike stillness until many long minutes had gone by.

"Men, resume your oars!"

The deep voice of their chief caused all to start, as though a spirit of the deep had addressed them, but silently the oarsmen obeyed, the three forms that had before crouched in the bottom of the boat resumed their places, and the long, black boat, hardly blacker than the gloom resting upon the sea, again moved forward over the waters.

"Sail ho!"

This time the cry came from no madman's lips, and it was not conjured up by an anguish-heated brain, for it was spoken in the ringing tones of the helmsman, whose eyes had constantly peered into the darkness ahead.

Involuntarily the oarsmen turned, and the three crouching forms came upright, and, like one voice came the cry of wild joy that went from every lip.

It was no madman's hallucination, for each one of the drifting, despairing, starving boat's crew beheld not two cables' length ahead a large vessel rising and falling upon the ocean swell.

"Thank God, we are just in time, for within half an hour the tempest will break upon the sea."

"Give way, men!"

And, at the command of their chief, the oarsmen bent with a will to their work, and the long-boat forged rapidly forward.

Nearer and nearer to the vessel it drew, and the helmsman saw that she was lying to, and yet had considerable sail set, as it flapped dismally with each rise of the hull upon a passing swell.

But no light gleamed forth from the fore rigging, no glimmer came from binnacle or cabin, and all was darkness on board.

Nearer and nearer drew the boat, and yet there was heard no hail from the officer on deck, and the creaking of blocks and swinging yards, flapping of canvas and clanking of chains only were heard.

Why was it, with a tempest brewing, no nimble seamen scaled the rigging?

Why was it that, in a darkness that was tangible, no light was kept?

These questions the stern helmsman of the

boat asked himself again and again, and with no solution of the mystery he raised his voice and hailed:

"Ho, the barque, aboy!"

No answer came, and once more he cried:

"Ho, the barque! Will you give succor to a shipwrecked crew?"

No answer still came, and with an impatient exclamation he said:

"Give way, men! We will board him, and by waking his lazy crew up in time to save their vessel, win our welcome."

And on sped the long-boat, until only a few lengths distant, when suddenly a wild flash of lightning rent the heavens in twain, and every eye beheld a sight that must go with them to their graves, for there lay the huge black hull rolling to and fro upon the waters, her sails in tatters, and from her yard-arms, mizzen-gaff, and end of the flying jib-boom were swinging human forms!

"Good God! it is the gallows ship! Back water for your lives, men, or we are doomed!"

The cry rung out fiercely from the lips of the captain, and the long-boat fairly bounded out of the water, under the tremendous pressure of the oars of her horrified crew.

CHAPTER I.

THE HIDDEN SIN.

UPON the bold and rugged coast of England, ever washed by the restless seas, still stands a gloomy pile of rock, which in the olden time was known as Castle Welcome Haven, from the fact of its snug harborage, beneath the shadow of its walls, and the warm greeting extended to all who sought its hospitality.

Now it is known as Castle Curse, and the old-time dwellers near its desolate and broad domain, tell weird stories of the rambling old rock-pile, whose only inhabitants now are the sea-fowl, owls and bats, for human beings give it a wide berth, and the shepherd lad whose flocks feed on the hills and valleys in full view of its turrets, is careful that none of his sheep or cattle shall stray beneath the shadow of its gray, crumbling stones.

But into that castle I would have my reader accompany me, at a time when its halls were not deserted, and its lord and master dwelt there in almost regal splendor.

A younger son of a noble he had inherited no title and estates, but going to the East Indies he had amassed a vast fortune, and returning to England had purchased Castle Welcome Haven, and settled down to a life of luxury and bachelor freedom, while his elder brother, the one who had become the inheritor of a baronetcy and fortune from their father, had only the former left, having run through with the latter by extravagant living.

Although he had never liked even his younger brother, when they were boys together, upon his return with a large fortune, the baronet, with his beautiful daughter, Eve, had promptly called upon him, to welcome him back to England, after his long stay in foreign lands.

Alvin Alstone, the East Indian millionaire, at once read his brother's motive, as well as the fact that his lovely niece was no fortune-hunter, but seemed to possess a noble soul.

"I'll give Eve a small legacy, but Sir Grey Alstone, my scheming brother, who, in the long ago gave me only his hatred, need not expect me to give him my gold now."

Such had been the decision of the bachelor-millionaire, after the departure of Sir Grey and Eve from Castle Welcome Haven.

But the returned East Indian lived not long to enjoy his hard-earned wealth, as a few months after his settling down to a life of ease in his grand castle home, he was stricken down with disease, and death boldly stalked into the grand halls to claim its victim.

In the chamber where lies the dying man all is hushed, and nurses creep to and fro on tip-toe; but below stairs in the vast library a strange scene is taking place, for two men are there in angry converse.

One of them is the baronet, Sir Grey Alstone, the other is a tall, sad-faced man in the garb of a priest.

Upon the faces of both are trouble and anger stamped, and the voice of Sir Grey is trembling with passion as he says:

"You know then, Brandt, that my brother has made his will in favor of this young spend-thrift noble, Lord Caverly?"

"I do," was the answer in the deep, low tones of Pere Brandt.

"And myself, priest?"

"He leaves nothing to."

"Curse him for that."

"Stay! Sir Grey Alstone, curse not the one upon whom the finger of death is laid."

"When God's hand is upon a man withhold your impious touch," sternly said the priest.

"Don't preach to me, Pere Brandt, for I am in no mood for it, but tell me what legacy has he left my child?"

"She gets one thousand pounds as a marriage dowry."

"One thousand curses!" almost shrieked the baronet.

"That is all, Sir Grey."

"But it shall not be, for he shall change his will."

The priest smiled, but the baronet hissed forth:

"Oh, you may smile, *Pere Brandt*, but I mean it, that *Alvin Alstone* shall change his will."

"He is dying."

"That may be, but he will yet live for some hours."

"Perhaps."

"He is not unconscious?"

"No."

"He is in full possession of his senses?"

"Yes."

"Then he shall change his will."

"He will be as firm as the Rock of Gibraltar."

"If I asked it, yes, but—"

"Eve, I know, will make no such request of him?" said the priest quickly and in an inquiring tone.

"No, she would die a pauper first."

"Who then?"

"You!"

"Never!"

"I say you will, *Grayson Brandt*," hissed the baronet.

"And I say never," and the priest turned deadly pale, while his voice trembled slightly.

With a vicious laugh *Sir Grey Alstone* turned upon him and asked in a low tone:

"Have you forgotten that we were at college together, *Grayson Brandt*?"

"I am *Pere Brandt*, *Sir Grey Alstone*," sternly said the priest.

"In the church you may be; but I know you as *Grayson Brandt*, who twenty-five years ago married—"

"For the love of the Virgin, hold!" cried *Pere Brandt*, in pleading tones, and he wrung his small, slender hands together nervously.

"No, I shall tell that secret which you and I only know, *Grayson Brandt*. I shall make you feel what it is to thwart me in my desperation, for I am desperate, with debts staring me in the face, and ruin treading on my heels."

"*Alvin Alstone's* money, willed to my daughter, with me his executor, will save me, and if you will not help me, then when I fall, I shall drag you down with me, accursed priest."

The baronet was now quivering with rage, and the priest saw in his eyes that he meant all he said, and said anxiously:

"*Grey Alstone*, for the love of God, spare me!"

"No!"

"But I cannot make him change the will."

"You can, by exercising your priestly will, and threatening him with everlasting torment, for he is a faithful believer in your creed."

"But I dare not so offend the laws of God and man," came in piteous tones from the strong man.

"Then I shall brand you before the world as—"

"But I was innocent in the sight of high Heaven."

"Appearances are against you, *Grayson Brandt*, and circumstantial evidence has hanged many an innocent man."

The priest shuddered, and his face became livid, while he seemed to totter with the emotions that overwhelmed him, while his tormentor gazed mercilessly at him, and said, after a moment's silence:

"Time presses, *Pere Brandt*, and *Alvin Alstone* is dying, so speak your will quickly, or—"

"Oh, God, have mercy! *I yield!*"

A fiendish look came into *Sir Grey's* face, and then he fairly trembled with joy, as he cried:

"Then hasten to his bedside and use your power; remember, *Eve* must inherit all."

Without a word the priest passed his hands several times over his truly noble face, and then left the room, the baronet remaining behind, gloating over the victory he had won, and seeming to feel no doubt of the result.

CHAPTER II.

THE CURSE.

ALVIN ALSTONE knew that hope was over, for the doctor had told him there was none.

The East Indian climate had undermined his health, while the country was yielding him a fortune, and his dream of a luxurious old age had ended soon after he returned to England.

The grand old castle, his servants, his gold, all must slip from his grasp which death palsied.

But, with the resignation which seems one of Nature's best gifts to the dying, *Alvin Alstone* accepted his fate, and lay counting the hours as they ebbed away.

It was night, and he felt that the dawn of day would never come to him, for weaker and weaker grew his pulse, though his mind remained clear.

He smiled as his confessor entered, and said faintly:

"I die at peace with the world; but I would see my brother."

"First let me say something to you, *Mr. Alstone*, and alone," said the priest in a low tone, and good Catholics, the nurses left the room.

"Well, *Pere Brandt*?" said the dying man.

"I am sorry to say that I am not content with the way in which you willed your property," began the priest.

"Why I remembered our church generously," answered *Alvin Alstone* with surprise.

"Yes, and I, as its priest, thank you; but you have willed your vast estate away from your own flesh and blood."

"I will it to *Aubrey Caverly*, the son of the man who did for me more than my father, and to whom I owe the foundation of my fortune."

"His son has a noble title, but is poor, and to him I leave my wealth."

"But your kindred?"

"They do not deserve it."

"How has the Lady *Eve* forfeited your respect and love?"

"In no way; she is a noble girl, and I left her a legacy."

"A mere pittance, *Mr. Alstone*, when she should have been the heiress," said the priest warmly.

"Not for her father to squander my gold, *Pere Brandt*; he inherited the title, he got the fortune, and the former is all that is left, and he shall not handle my gold."

"His daughter certainly has character enough to manage the inheritance."

"With all his faults she loves her father, and he would get it from her."

"Still I beg of you to make her your heiress."

"Never!"

"Reflect, my son."

"No."

"Then I must insist."

"But can you do so?"

"Yes, when you are doing a wrong on your death-bed," said the priest in a low, firm tone.

"But I do no wrong, priest."

"I feel to the contrary."

"If I refuse?" asked the dying man in a whisper.

"I shall have to withhold from you absolution," and the voice of *Pere Brandt* trembled.

Even the pallor on the face of the dying man deepened at this, and he said eagerly:

"No, no, you would not do this, *Pere Brandt*!"

"I must."

"Oh God! must I cast off all hope and risk this?" he groaned.

"No, my son, do as I wish."

"No, I will risk the future," said *Alvin Alstone* firmly, "for," he added, "I feel that I have done my duty."

"And will you risk the everlasting curse too, *Alvin Alstone*?"

There was a stern ring in the tones of the priest, for he saw the man slipping through his grasp, and whatever his own guilt or innocence in the hidden sin held over him by *Sir Grey Alstone*, he must protect himself, he felt.

Alvin Alstone shuddered at these words, and cried:

"No, no, I will not go into the grave with a curse upon me; I will change my will, but in one way only."

"And that change?"

"I leave *Lord Aubrey Caverly* my fortune, upon condition he marries my niece, *Eve Alstone*."

"If she dies, he gets all; if he dies, she inherits all."

"I'll not do more, *Pere Brandt*."

The priest saw that he meant what he said, and that little time was to be lost, and instantly summoned the confidential agent of the millionaire and had the clause in the will inserted and duly witnessed.

Propped up upon pillows *Alvin Alstone* then signed his name in a hand that was perfectly firm, and then said, in clear tones:

"*Pere Brandt*, to escape everlasting damnation, and a curse upon my grave, so have I left my fortune; but now, in your presence, I give my dying curse eternally upon this old castle, upon all property I possess and my gold, and cursed forever more be those who inherit it even to their children's children."

All stood aghast at his fearful oath, and gazed in breathless silence, expecting him to say more.

But he remained silent, and *Pere Brandt* sprung to his side to find him sitting bolt upright, his eyes wide open and staring, his lips parted as the curse had come from them, but the spirit gone, for *Alvin Alstone* was dead.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE AND GOLD.

ALVIN ALSTONE was laid in the marble tomb of his ancestors, and *Castle Welcome Haven* was deserted, the servants seeming glad to fly from its roof, upon which a bitter curse had fallen, and ere long it became known as *Castle Curse*.

With the terms of the will *Sir Grey Alstone* was compelled to be content, for his daughter had inherited the estate on conditions, and, if he could hasten her marriage, he felt certain that he could obtain from her sufficient money to pay his debts, which were now not as pressing, as it had been rumored abroad, at his instigation, that he had shared liberally in the inheritance.

As for *Lord Aubrey Caverly*, the baronet had never liked him as a prospective son-in-law.

He knew the young noble came of a race whose extravagances had impoverished them, and though he felt that he loved *Eve*, if willing to take her without a dowry, he did not believe in "love matches" by which no money came into his coffers.

A handsome, dashing young officer of the dragoons was *Lord Aubrey*, like *Sir Grey* always in debt, but most generally popular with his associates, which was not the case with the baronet.

He had first met *Eve Alstone* at a run across country after a fox and fallen in love with her form and riding, and tried hard to overtake her to see her face; but she had held the lead, and it was only when *Reynard's* "brush" was presented to her that he caught a good look at her, and from that moment his heart was gone.

Though liking him, *Eve* did not encourage him, and yet he was jealous of her every look upon any one else.

One day, when out sailing with a party in a small yacht, a squall capsized the boat, and *Eve*, with a number of others, were left struggling for life in the rough waters.

Fortunately it happened to be near where a vessel-of-war was anchored, and a young lieutenant had seen the catastrophe, ordered a boat lowered, while he had sprung overboard and soon held *Eve Alstone* securely in his arms.

Leading her to the upturned boat, he also rescued another maiden, and then *Lord Aubrey Caverly*, who was a very poor swimmer, and the man-of-war's boat coming up, all were saved.

Taken on board the man-of-war, the pleasure party were cared for most kindly, until dry clothing had been sent for, and when *Eve Alstone* returned to *Alstone Hall* that night, it was to dream of a tall, manly form, a daring, handsome face, and eyes that had seemed to look down into her very heart, and she confessed to herself that she had received her first lesson in love, and that the dragoon faded before the naval officer.

It was not long before *Lord Aubrey* also realized that in *Lieutenant Leon St. Vale*, of the Royal Navy, he had a most dangerous rival, and, although he owed to him his life, he hated him most cordially, and was a very happy man when he discovered the terms of the will of *Alvin Alstone*, which made it a necessity for him to marry *Eve Alstone*, a necessity he hoped and believed the maiden would see as well as he did.

The curse accompanying the inheritance was religiously kept away from *Eve* by her cunning father, and when made known to the young dragoon, he felt no scruples, as he would take the gold, though it were covered with curses sufficient to tarnish it.

It was with a sad heart that *Eve Alstone* learned the nature of her uncle's will, and at first she rebelled; but her father pleaded with her to save him from ruin, and threatened suicide if she did not, and burying her love for *Leon St. Vale* in her inmost heart, she consented to sell herself for gold to *Lord Caverly*.

In the times that the two, *Eve Alstone* and the naval officer, had met, they had not only learned to love each other devotedly, but managed to become secretly accepted lovers, and it was with a heart full of bitterness that the maiden sat down and wrote to *Leon St. Vale*:

"Forgive and forget me, as I am unworthy of you, having sold myself for gold. *Eve.*"

But the naval officer had risen rapidly in rank from his nerve, daring and resolute spirit, and he was not the man to give *Eve* up quietly, when he knew that she loved him, and felt sure she was sacrificing herself to save her father, and he boldly called at *Alstone Hall*.

As ill-fortune would have it, he found there *Lord Caverly*, who had just signed with *Eve* and *Sir Grey* the marriage contract, and, though apparently safe in his prospect of gaining her for his bride, the young noble allowed his jealousy to get the best of him, and assuming the right of host, said sneeringly:

"This is a family meeting, *Lieutenant St. Vale*, and your presence was not asked."

"Neither was it, sir, on a former occasion, when I dragged you out of the water, but I was there as you may remember, and being here now, it is for *Sir Grey*, not yourself, to tell me that my presence is distasteful either to himself or his daughter," was the cool reply.

Sir Grey's cunning brain at once saw a better way out of his trouble than begging another man's wife for money to pay his debts, even if that wife was his own daughter, and he was delighted at the quarrel, for he mentally congratulated himself that it would lead to a private encounter between the rivals, and he muttered:

"They do say at the clubs that *St. Vale* is a dead-shot and a master of the sword, and were he to kill *Lord Caverly*, why *Eve* gets the entire fortune."

With this idea in his mind, the reader can readily observe that it was not his intention to pour oil on the troubled waters, and he said in reply:

"My dear St. Vale, I am always glad to see you, but Lord Caverly is my intended son-in-law, and as he is to be Eve's lord and master, he knows best who he desires for her acquaintances."

Leon St. Vale made no reply, but bowed low and turned toward the door, when Eve advanced quickly toward him, and grasping his hand, said warmly:

"Lieutenant St. Vale, neither my father nor Lord Caverly can command my heart, though they possess my hand and fortune, and, owing you my life as I do, you will ever be remembered by me with respect and affection."

Leon St. Vale said softly, as he bent and kissed her hand:

"I thank you, Eve."

The next instant he had gone; but the act was not allowed to rest without comment on the part of Sir Grey, who fanned the jealous spark in Lord Caverly's bosom into a flame, and by certain insinuations that St. Vale had better be looked to, so wrought up the young noble, that he publicly insulted the young naval officer at the club that night, and was promptly knocked down for it.

Of course the matter could not end here between two such men, and rivals in love, besides the one representing the army, the other the navy, and the result was a challenge from Lord Caverly, which was sent by Sir Grey Alstone himself, for the baronet was most anxious to see the affair terminate according to his wishes, and was determined there should be no flaw in the preliminaries, while he muttered over and over again, as he drove to the lieutenant's quarters to deliver the challenge:

"I could forgive St. Vale for killing my intended son-in-law, and even grant my consent for him to marry Eve, after I had had my pickings of my dear brother Alvin's fortune."

Nettled by gold-conquering love in the heart of Eve, Leon St. Vale's reply to the challenge was:

"Tell Lord Caverly, Sir Grey, that I will afford him the satisfaction he demands with heartfelt pleasure."

CHAPTER IV.

SOWING THE WIND, AND REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

LISTLESSLY the waves rolled upon the white sands, and breaking upon them, scattered foamy flakes in one unbroken line, like a white belt, along the beach.

The sun was going down in the west, and its rosy rays illumined the faces of three persons standing upon the beach, almost beneath the shadow of Castle Curse, which rose bold and frowning upon the rocks above.

Coming in toward the spot where the little group of three stood, was a small man-of-war's boat, under a leg-of-mutton sail, which did not drive her swiftly along, under the light breeze then blowing.

"He is late on account of the dying out of the wind; but better late than never, my lord," said Sir Grey Alston, who composed one of the trio on the beach, while the third, carefully rubbing a surgical instrument he held in his hands, until it shone like glass, was evidently the surgeon, brought along by the young noble in case his services should be needed.

Lord Caverly almost looked disappointed, when he saw the boat round the point, and enter the harbor of Welcome Haven, as he had hoped that Leon St. Vale would not come, and he could therefore brand him as a coward, and refuse to meet him again; but, recognizing his rival and his second in the stern-sheets, he knew that the duel must come off.

"He seems confident, my lord, for he has brought no surgeon with him," said Sir Grey, anxious to excite Lord Caverly all in his power.

"Yes, there are but three in the boat and one of those is a common sailor," answered Lord Caverly; "but if he needs a surgeon's aid, Doctor Fincastle will serve him doubtless," replied the young noble.

"Surgeon Fincastle does not expect to be called upon, if my Lord Caverly and Lieutenant St. Vale are in deadly earnest," was the significant reply of the man of instruments, who was surgeon of Lord Caverly's troop.

"I have heard that St. Vale is a dead shot, and a master of the art of fencing, and I hope you are also, my lord," said Sir Grey.

"I am proficient in the use of both the pistol and sword," was the reply, and Lord Caverly began to pace to and fro, a cloud creeping slowly over his brow.

The next instant the bow of the boat ran upon the sandy beach, and springing out the seaman held it steady, while St. Vale and his second, a brother naval officer, sprang ashore.

Both of the naval officers were in full uniform, and were smoking, while Leon St. Vale's face was very pale, and a strange look haunted his eyes.

Raising his hat politely he advanced toward Lord Caverly, and said in a low, but firm tone:

"Lord Caverly, I regret to be half an hour late, sir, but the wind, which was fresh at my departure, died down and detained me, and I beg your consideration, and that of your friends."

"It is granted, sir," coldly replied the young noble.

"And, Lord Aubrey Caverly," resumed the naval officer. "I have come here, sir, to say that this meeting between you and myself cannot go further."

All present, even to the second of Lieutenant St. Vale, were astounded, and Sir Grey Alstone turned deadly pale, while Lord Caverly asked sternly:

"May I ask for an explanation of your words, sir?"

"I decline to meet you, that is all," was the calm reply.

"You refuse to give me satisfaction for the blow you gave me at the club?"

"I did but punish you for your insulting language."

"And you shall answer for the blow, or humbly apologize," and the young noble spoke hotly.

"I shall do neither, sir."

"Then, by Heaven, I brand you as an infamous coward, unworthy the uniform you wear."

The words rung out sharp and stinging, and had Leon St. Vale been a corpse the hue of his face could not have been more deadly.

For an instant he stood like a statue of bronze, and every eye was fixed upon him.

Then his cheeks flushed, his face became brighter, and with a smile he said in the softest tones:

"My dear Lord Caverly, as you seem so pressing in your determination to meet me, I cannot refuse."

"Mr. Dudley, will you kindly arrange with Sir Grey Alstone?"

The sudden change again took all by surprise, for the lieutenant was certainly acting in a most mysterious way; but with a sigh of relief at the turn of the tide in the affair, Captain Rupert Dudley, the commander and second of Leon St. Vale, hastily advanced toward Sir Grey, whose delight shone in his face.

"The weapons were to be pistols, with a fall back to swords, if not fatal," said Sir Grey.

"On the contrary, Sir Grey, they were to be swords, with a fall back to pistols if the affair went further than for one of the principals to be disarmed, or slightly wounded," answered Captain Dudley, and the baronet acknowledged his mistake, but failed to say that he had been most anxious to end the affair at once.

With the utmost coolness Leon St. Vale took his stand, his face no longer pale, and his manner indifferent, in strong contrast to what it was when he had declined the meeting.

Stern and determined Lord Caverly received his sword, and at a word the blades crossed and the duel was begun, the surgeon looking on with interest, the baronet with fiendish delight, and Captain Dudley with anxiety.

A few passes, and one blade flew into the air and fell into the sea.

It was the weapon of Lord Aubrey Caverly, and Leon St. Vale said coldly, as he lowered his own sword point:

"I give you your life, Lord Aubrey Caverly."

"This is no reparation to me, sir, for the blow, and I demand another meeting," hotly said the noble.

Again Leon St. Vale turned pale, seemed about to refuse, as he shook his head, when Lord Caverly, urged by Sir Grey in a low whisper, asked with a sneer:

"Do you fear to face me with weapons which will place us on more equal footing, as your superb swordsmanship is well known?"

"I am in the hands of Captain Dudley, Lord Caverly, to refuse, or accept for me," was the indifferent reply of the young sailor as he turned on his heel.

"Then of course, if my principal demands it, Captain Dudley, Lieutenant St. Vale must meet him?" said Sir Grey Alstone eagerly.

"Merely through courtesy, sir, as Lieutenant St. Vale once saved Lord Caverly's life, has now given it to him at this meeting, and certainly has a right to refuse, but as he leaves it with me, and you and your principal seem anxious to press the matter, I will grant it, Sir Grey, with pistols at ten paces."

Sir Grey bowed low to hide the joy in his face, and a moment after the rivals once more faced each other.

It was evident to all that Leon St. Vale meant no trifling, and Lord Caverly's eyes drooped as he met the burning gaze of his antagonist; but he remained calm, though very pale, and in quick, distinct tones Captain Dudley spoke the fatal words, and the pistols flashed together.

But while Leon St. Vale remained standing cool and firm, Lord Aubrey Caverly leaped into the air and fell almost at his feet a corpse, for the bullet of his rival had pierced his heart.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

TEN days have passed away since the fatal duel between Lord Caverly and Leon St. Vale, and the clubs and drawing-rooms of London were still excited over the result, which took from their midst the gallant young dragoon captain, at the hands of his sailor rival.

Of course the officers of the army sided with the dead noble, their comrade, while those of the navy upheld St. Vale, though all were at a loss to understand the strange conduct of the sailor in first refusing to meet his rival, and then in killing him, after once sparing his life; yet all gave him credit for indomitable pluck, where he had at first seemed to be cowardly in wishing to avoid the meeting, for his secret motive none knew.

That Eve Alstone was at the bottom of the trouble, all knew, for romance as well as reality must have a woman in the case, and she became at once a heroine in the eyes of the world, which also considered her as more beautiful and fascinating than ever from the fact that her intended husband had been killed at the hands of a lover, who by the act had caused her to inherit a vast fortune, for the terms of Alvin Alstone's will had leaked out, as there never was a secret thoroughly kept.

Of course it was known that a curse went with the gold of the dead millionaire, but that served only to add greater interest to the whole affair, and after nine days' talk Eve Alstone and Leon St. Vale were still the subjects of universal conversation.

As for the young sailor he kept religiously on board his vessel, which was soon to sail on a cruise to American waters, and Eve had put on deep mourning for Lord Caverly, and whether refusing to be comforted, like Rachel, no one knew, as only her father and her maid had seen her since the night on which she learned of the fatal meeting between the rivals.

But, upon the afternoon of the tenth day Eve Alstone sat in her pleasant room, watching the sun go down behind the hills, and now and then glancing at an open letter in her hand.

She was in deep mourning, and her face seemed almost as white as marble, and her eyes had a dreamy, far-away look.

Starting, at a knock upon her door, she hastily thrust the letter into her bosom and said quickly:

"Come in!"

It was Sir Grey Alstone, and the look of worry, almost habitual to him of late years, had faded from his face, which was now really joyous.

Advancing, he kissed his daughter on the forehead, and taking a seat at the window beside her, he said:

"Why Eve, you seem badly drooping of late, so I think I have news for you that will bring back color to your cheeks."

"Is it strange, father, when one I intended to marry should have fallen by the hand of one I loved?" she asked sadly.

"Tut! tut! and he helped you to just fifty thousand a year, for I have gone over the entire papers with the lawyer."

"I am not mercenary, sir, and I would give all to have Lord Aubrey out of the dark tomb where he now lies, and his life not on the soul of Leon St. Vale."

"Aubrey was a fool to be jealous, Eve, and he brought it upon himself, for he forced St. Vale to meet him, after he had positively declined to do so."

"Father, is this the truth?" and Eve was upon her feet in an instant, her face flushed and eager.

"Yes, Eve, but don't get excited about it."

"Tell me of it, sir."

"Well, St. Vale put in an appearance on the ground quite late, and then declined to fight, when Lord Caverly called him a coward, and said he was unworthy to wear the naval uniform, and the duel followed."

Eve made no reply, but a strange look came over her face, and she even smiled, while she said quickly:

"What is the good news you bring, father?"

"Well, the king has given me a civil appointment of importance in Canada, and I am ordered there at once, or that is within a month."

"Indeed, sir! It is a pity this did not come when you needed aid so much."

"Ah! but I need the appointment now, Eve, for I cannot think of living on your income, large as it is; but I shall have to borrow a small sum from you, to get my creditors to allow me to go."

"Oh, how fearful it is to be a slave, as you are, father, to your creditors, and willingly I will advance you the money for your ransom from slavery."

"You put it devilish strong, Eve," and Sir Grey winced.

"Because, sir, I have seen you cringe at the sight of a tradesman, as before a master."

"But we will not refer to this, father, only tell me what I am to do to aid you?"

"You are a noble girl, Eve; well, it seems that the interest accumulated rapidly upon dear brother Alvin, who, economical old soul, could not spend it, and there is about ten thousand pounds, more or less, accumulated in the Threadneedle Bank, from this interest alone, and, as my debts can be cleared by that sum, and it is separate from the regular inheritance, you know, I thought I would borrow of you what may be there to your credit."

"Certainly, father, and I hope it will square

you with the world of creditors who are dogging your steps."

"It will, my child; now fill up this order for the money."

"To what sum, sir?"

"That is what I do not know, but, as I said, it is in the neighborhood of ten thousand, and just make it in full for what the bank holds in accumulated interest."

Eve, without hesitation, wrote the order, and her grasping father kissed her hand in gratitude, after which he said, having carefully folded the paper away:

"Now, my child, we sail for America within the month, and the change will do us both good, for, of course, you go with me."

"With pleasure, father, for I wish a sea voyage."

"Then I shall at once begin the settlement of my debts, and make my preparations to leave," and, again thanking his generous daughter, Sir Grey Alstone left the room.

And, as the door closed behind him, two remarks were made *sotto voce*.

The baronet muttered:

"There's a cool fifteen thousand in the Thread-needle Bank, the attorney hinted, and I'll get it all."

And Eve said:

"Yes, now I know what I do, I shall certainly meet him at Castle Curse, as poor uncle Alvin's inheritance to me is now called."

"Ah, me! will it prove a curse, I wonder?"

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE SHADOW OF CASTLE CURSE.

FOR some time after her father had left the room Eve Alstone, or "Lady Eve," as she was called, sat at the window of her pleasant room gazing out upon the scene of valley and hill which she loved so well.

But, though the hill-tops were rosy with the tints of the setting sun, and all nature seemed beautiful, the eyes of the maiden seemed not now charmed with the scene, for her manner was *distracted* and nervous, and she tapped the floor impatiently with her slippered foot.

At length the shadows began to deepen, the sun sunk behind the hill-tops, and Eve arose and threw around her a mantle, and prepared otherwise for a walk out of doors.

Watching an opportunity when there were no servants visible in the front of the house she slipped out upon the lawn, and, gaining the shelter of a hawthorn hedge, wended her way rapidly along toward the west.

The wind had risen slightly as the sun went down, and sighed mournfully through the trees, and the forest was dark and forbidding.

But Eve did not hesitate, for she was of a fearless nature, and, as though well acquainted with the path, hastened on into its depths.

It was a long, dismal walk of a mile, before she emerged from the gloom of the timber out upon an open space, from whence, in the distance, was visible a gloomy pile, behind which was a silvery light in the heavens, the precursor of the rising moon.

Crossing a wall of stone, by a stile, she followed a winding path directly toward the gloomy pile of rock, which now, with the bright light behind it, developed into a grand old castle, with every turret, angle and roof standing out in *bas* relief.

Around the castle the ornamental grounds were weed-grown, and upon all there seemed to rest an air of total desertion and neglect, for not a glimmer of light came from a window, excepting where the moon cast its rays through the towers, giving them the effect of being brilliantly lighted up.

A monotonous roar beyond reached the maiden's ears, and she paused an instant, but resumed her walk as she said:

"It is the roar of the surf upon the beach."

As she drew near the somber pile of rock she again paused, as though, with all her courage, not wishing to trust herself nearer.

But as she stood there a tall form suddenly advanced from the shadow of the castle, and, the moonlight falling full upon him, was reflected by a dazzling uniform that he wore.

"Lady Eve, you are a brave, noble woman to meet me here," he said, earnestly, as he advanced toward her.

"At first I thought I would not come, Lieutenant St. Vale, but afterward changed my mind, as you wrote that you sailed so soon," she replied.

"Yes, within a few days, and we go to the American shores, for since our last war with the States there have been a number of privateers of both sides that have turned to piracy, and our Government is determined to hunt them off the sea, and for that purpose our vessel goes."

"It is a dangerous work you enter upon," she said, softly.

"Yes, and yet a sailor's and soldier's duty is to face danger with pleasure; but come, stroll with me on the beach, where the moonlight falls, and let us talk together, for I have much to say to you, as we may never meet again, Lady Eve."

He drew her hand within his arm as he spoke and led her down the stone steps to the sandy beach, she making no resistance.

Reaching the shore he would have turned to the left, but she led him toward the right, as though involuntarily, while she said:

"I go to America, too, Lieutenant St. Vale."

"You! no, that cannot be," he replied, with surprise.

"It is true, for Sir Grey goes out under the king's commission to Canada, and I shall accompany him."

"The saints be praised! then we shall meet again, Eve, as Halifax on the northern coast will be our rendezvous," he said, joyously.

She made no reply for full a moment, and halted, while she said, in a low tone:

"Do you know this spot, Lieutenant St. Vale?"

He started, gazed earnestly into her face, and responded, firmly:

"I do."

"It is here that you broke faith with me."

"Hear me, Eve, for it was to tell you why I broke my pledged word to you that I wished to meet you to-night."

"As I promised in my letter to you, I came here to this fatal spot and declined to meet Lord Caverly."

"All were intensely surprised, but I gave no explanation more than a refusal to fight, even to Captain Dudley, my second."

"Believing that I acted wholly from fear of facing him, Lord Caverly used these words:

"I brand you as an infamous coward, unworthy the uniform you wear."

"Lady Eve, you know not all those words portend, for they would force me to wear the curse of cowardice before my fellow-men, and drive me out of the king's service as unworthy to wear my sword."

"Then, Lady Eve, I broke my pledge, but determined to spare him, and I gave him his life after disarming him."

"But a second meeting was pressed upon me, and to kill him was in my heart, and I did so."

"This is my explanation, and I hope I may not be unforgotten in your sight."

He took off his hat and stood with bowed, uncovered head before her.

For an instant she was silent, and then said, in her low, sweet tones:

"Leon St. Vale, do you see yonder tower of Castle Curse, as my inheritance is now called?" and she pointed to the eastern turret overhanging the beach.

"Yes, Lady Eve."

"Well, in that tower I stood the day of your duel here."

He started, and gazed earnestly into her face, while she continued:

"Some strange foreboding that your pledge would be broken caused me to come here, for I learned from my father where the meeting was to take place, and fascinated, I was compelled to remain."

"I saw their impatience at your not coming on time, and in my heart I blessed and thanked you."

"Then I saw them start and gaze out over the harbor, and I looked too, and beheld your boat."

"I saw you land, say something to Lord Aubrey, and then what followed I could not keep my fascinated gaze from, and the scene will go with me to my grave, as it must with you."

"I beheld him fall, and saw him borne up the castle steps, while you sailed away, as I believed, having broken your pledge to me."

"Then I looked upon his dead face, and in my heart I felt bitterness toward you."

"But now, Eve, are you bitter still?" he asked, softly.

"No."

"And you love me as—"

"Sh—! You must not speak now of love to me, Leon, for do you not see that I am draped in black?"

"For a man whom you did not love, and whom force of circumstances would have made you marry," he answered, bitterly.

"Lieutenant St. Vale, let us not speak of the past, and only hope for the future."

"I came here to hear your own words of why you broke your pledge to me, and now we must part."

"But not forever, Eve?"

"That depends upon you; come, lead me back to the forest path."

"I will not allow you to go alone, but see you to the grounds of Alstone Hall."

"I thank you, for that forest was so dreary to-night, and all through it, I felt as though Aubrey Caverly was walking by my side," and she shuddered, and starting suddenly, cried:

"See! what is that dark object? It looks like a human body flung ashore by the waves."

"It is only my little boat, love, that I came here in, for I cared not to ride horseback, as I might be seen and recognized, which would compromise you; besides," he added hesitatingly: "I have a duty to perform to-night after leaving you, and I can only go then in a boat."

"A duty?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes: you know Crag Cove a league down the coast?"

"Yes, for I have often ridden there to see the old Rock Ruin."

"That old ruin, Lady Eve, was once the home of my ancestors, and was known as Rock Hall, as it now is called Rock Ruin."

"But those of my blood were wild, reckless and extravagant, and it passed out of my father's hands into those of a wealthy landholder, a cousin of ours, who let it go to decay."

"And it is there you are going to night?"

"Yes, Eve."

"It is strange, for no one dwells there."

"True, but it is my inheritance, I have discovered, and I go to look it over by moonlight," and he spoke bitterly, and again drawing her arm through his, he led her back by Castle Curse, through the dark forest, and bidding her farewell, saw her disappear within the portals of Alstone Hall.

Then he turned and retraced his way back by the old castle, passed the spot where he had killed Lord Caverly, and springing into his little boat seized the oars and pulled in the direction of Rock Ruin.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET OF A DUNGEON.

AFTER running a league down the coast, Leon St. Vale rounded a rocky point of land, which formed the arm of a small cove, surrounded by bleak shores.

Upon the edge of a crag jutting out from the main plateau, stood a ruin of what had once been a seaside home, but which was now nothing more than a mass of crumbling walls.

Upon these the moonlight fell with silvery light, relieving their gloom, and to the sheltered nook, or basin, beneath, Leon St. Vale headed his boat.

There was no landing, other than a moss-covered rock, and upon this the young sailor sprang, and placed a small anchor, to which the painter was attached, to prevent his boat being carried off by the wash of the waves.

"Now to see what the letter says, so that I can make no mistake," said St. Vale, as he drew from his pocket a large paper with a broken seal, and opened it, so that the moonlight fell full upon it.

In a low tone he then read:

"SOHO SQUARE, LONDON,
October 1st, 18—"

"To my cousin, Lieutenant Leon St. Vale, greeting:"

"Ere the film of death shuts out the light from my eyes, I write you these few lines from my lonely bachelor quarters in this great city, and send my epistle through the Admiralty, to find you wherever you may be roving the seas."

"In leaving this world to go to a land where gold is not needed, that which I now possess should be left to those who are of my own flesh and blood, and hence I name you, Leon St. Vale, my heir to the little that I have."

"Old Rock Hall, your forefathers' home, and your birthplace, which I bought under the auctioneer's hammer, I leave to you, though little is it worth, and my living here in London goes to erect a monument to my memory, for I do that for myself, which my kindred, or no other man, will do for me."

"This closes my estate, and if you can make Rock Hall what it once was you may have a lordly home one of these days to carry a fair bride to, for thither your father led your mother just twenty-seven years ago to-night."

"With Rock Hall I leave you a secret, which the inclosed key will unlock."

"The key is rusty, as you see, for it has not been used in fifteen long years; but it will answer its purpose if properly used."

"Go to Rock Ruin by boat, land on the rock, under the crag that supports the octagonal tower, and you will find niches in the cliff by which you can ascend a few steps to a shelf of stone, where you will find ample standing room."

"Examine the face of the rock before you and you will find there a door of stone slabs and a hole that the inclosed key will fit into."

"Turn the key once to the right and then exert your strength, and you will open the door of rock, and a cell chamber will be revealed."

"Within that cell, Leon St. Vale, you will discover the balance of my inheritance to you, and the secret of Rock Hall will be revealed."

"Your blood kinsman,
"LUCAS LEON, of
"Rock Hall."

Having read this letter twice over, Leon St. Vale drew from his pocket a massive key, with a handle in the shape of a cross, the ends being long enough for his hand to get a firm grasp upon them.

A short examination of the face of the cliff then revealed the niches, and placing his feet in these, and keeping his hands against the wall of rock he readily ascended to the shelf above and here paused for awhile.

The crack in the rock, showing the door of stone, he saw distinctly, and without hesitation inserted the key in the hole.

But it was rusty, and would not turn in the lock, and drawing it out he rubbed it hard against the rock until it obtained a polish, when once more he inserted it in the key-hole and it turned in the lock.

But, strong as he was he could not move the stone door, for the spray of the sea had incumbered the cracks, and even the moss had grown in some places over the seams where it opened.

With his sword he went to work, removed the moss, and then thrust the blade into the seams upon either side, and above and below the door, and once more exerted his strength,

drawing hard upon the cross-shaped handle of the huge key, and placing his foot against the wall of rock to get greater power to bring to bear upon it.

Then slowly the stone door moved, and swung open, creaking upon its iron hinges in a way that sounded like the shrieks of spirits of the old ruin, furious at having the sanctity of their dismal abode invaded by sacrilegious man.

The rush of foul air that burst out of the cell caused Leon St. Vale to stagger back and nearly fall from the shelf of stone upon the rock below, and he turned his back until the pure winds had invaded the loathsome den.

"By Heavens! but it has the flavor of a dead-house, this secret inheritance of mine," muttered the young sailor, as he stood on the edge of the shelf, his back turned toward the cell.

After a short delay he again turned to the cell, stepped forward, and gazed within.

The moonlight streamed in with silvery radiance and displayed to his gaze a rock-chamber some ten feet square, and in the center, just fronting the door, was an iron chair.

And it held an occupant, the sight of which caused Leon St. Vale to start back, brave as he was, with a cry of horror.

And no wonder, for seated in the iron chair was a skeleton form, lashed there by chains around his ghastly body, while upon his wrists, his bony fingers being clasped before him, were *manacles of pure gold*, that reflected back the moonlight with dazzling rays.

The iron chair and chains had rusted, the flesh had dropped from the bones, to which shreds of clothing yet clung; but the golden manacles had remained pure and bright through the years that had gone by since.

"Good God! the Golden Fetters! the crest of my forefathers, on this skeleton form!" and Leon St. Vale staggered backward out of the lonely cell almost overcome by the discovery he had made.

CHAPTER VIII. THE GOLDEN FETTERS.

FOR some moments, as though struck with horror at this discovery, Lieutenant Leon St. Vale stood outside of the rock-cell, gazing spell-enraptured upon the iron chair and its skeleton occupant, which the bright moonlight revealed in all its ghastliness.

At length, with an effort, he advanced within the dungeon and looked attentively around him.

It contained nothing more than the iron chair fastened into the solid rock flooring, the chain-bound skeleton, with its shreds of clothing and without flesh, and the golden manacles that held the wrists.

The ankles were also manacled, but with iron and not precious metal.

Yes, there was one other object that attracted the attention of the young sailor, and this was a piece of paper bound around the top of the chair.

This he quickly took, for the strings had rotted, and the paper was stained and not very strong.

But there was writing upon it, and this was, strange to say, not faded out, as might have been expected.

"This may solve the secret," muttered St. Vale, as he unrolled the paper and stepped out into the moonlight to read what was thereon written.

"It is in my cousin's handwriting; yes, at the bottom is signed his name—Lucas Leon," he said, and then he began the perusal of the document.

In a low, slow manner he read:

"ROCK HALL, Oct. 1st, 18—.

"Leaving this, my home, to-night forever, I leave within its secret cell this paper, fastened above the head of one whom I hate with intensest hatred, and whom I now revenge myself upon by leaving here to die inch by inch breath by breath, and to suffer ages of mortal anguish in the hours he has to live.

"Nearly thirty years ago I saved the life of a young and beautiful girl, saved her from a band of kidnappers, who had stolen her from her home for ransom, and, because she would not swear never to reveal whom they were, which she had discovered, had determined to kill her.

"Many knew the story then, and will remember it now, and that in my encounter with her abductors I was seriously wounded, and lay for months in her father's house.

"And in that time I learned to love her as the heathen loves his idol, and I believed that she loved me, though she was rich and of noble blood, and I but of the gentry, yet of proud name.

"My regiment, for I was a soldier then, was sent to India, and by my cousin, and I believed also my friend, who was just returning home, I sent back to her words of love and hope.

"Alas! there ended my dream of love, for he whose blood was in my veins, he who was my friend, as I believed, maligned me to her I idolized, and stole from me my jewel.

"They forgot that I held claim upon her, and they were wedded, while I, captured by Sepoys, languished in captivity, cheered by only one thought, her truth and love for me.

"At last I escaped and came back to England to claim my bride, and found her the bride of another.

"I smiled to hide my pain, laughed to drown my groans, and in my heart I swore revenge.

"And this night I have my revenge, and it is a joy to me.

"That man, my cousin, Mercer St. Vale, who added insult to injury, by naming their child after me, had long thought that his branch of our house should possess the Golden Fetters, presented by the king to our great grandfather, for his gallantry in freeing the English sailors whom the Algerines held as slaves.

"Nobly he undertook the work, as history tells, and bravely did he accomplish it with his vessel and crew, taking from their cruel masters hundreds of men whose shackles had worn into their flesh.

"For this act the king gave him the Golden Fetters, which became the crest of our house, and to me they were handed down, though Mercer St. Vale had tried to rob me of them as he had robbed me of my bride.

"Now he has them, for I give them to him; ay, place them upon his wrists, and leave him in the secret cell to die, the victim of my revenge.

"LUCAS LEON, of Rock Hall."

A moan broke from the lips of the young sailor as he read these words, and it was some time before he could control the deep emotion that moved him to his inmost being.

Then he said in a low, sad tone:

"And that is my father, whom we all mourned as having been lost, while swimming in this very cove one moonlight night, fifteen years ago, for so said Lucas Leon.

"Invited here as the guest of him who penned these lines, he was cruelly made prisoner and left here to die; and such a death of anguish was his that I shudder to recall it, shut up within this loathsome cell, in chains, and starved by inches, with death's worst terrors staring him in the face.

"Oh, Lucas Leon, bitterly were you avenged for the wrong my father did you, and I wonder that you fled from this hated spot and let it go to him, when you knew the horrid secret it hid.

"And this is your inheritance to me?

"This old ruin, its ghastly secret, and my poor father's bones?

"Well for you is it, Lucas Leon, that you lay in your grave ere I knew what this rock held, or straight to this fearful den would I drag you to end your days as your victim did.

"And these are the Golden Fetters, which old nurses tell have been a curse to our race ever since the day the king bestowed them?

"Well, they are mine now, and I'll risk the curse that goes with them."

He took from the paper he held a small gold chain, with a key of the same precious metal attached, and unlocked the golden manacles.

Gently he removed them from the bony wrists, and yet some sudden movement caused the skeleton to sway, the dry bones fell in a heap in the chair of iron, and upon the stone floor, with a rattling sound, and the skull rolled out of the cell across the shelf, and falling upon the rock beneath bounded into the sea.

With a cry of horror the young sailor bounded out of the rock-chamber, which had been his father's tomb, and closing the heavy stone door after him, jumped down to the rock below, and springing into his boat, moved away from the fateful spot with every nerve tingling, his heart throbbing, and his brain on fire.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KING'S CRUISER.

SEVERAL weeks after the strange adventure and discovery of Leon St. Vale, at Rock Ruin, a trim-looking vessel of war, flying the flag of England at her peak, ran into Welcome Haven harbor, and dropping anchor close in under the shadow of Castle Curse, fired a heavy gun, which made a thousand echoes resound from the surrounding cliffs and crags, and sent the sea-birds soaring into the air with frightened shrieks.

Shortly after a boat put off for the shore, and in the stern sheets was a young and handsome officer in the uniform of a British lieutenant.

At the stone water-stairs of the castle he was met by Sir Grey Alstone, Lady Eve, and a valet and maid, while servants from the Hall were bringing down the luggage.

"Ah, Lord Milnor, I am glad to see you; Eve, my daughter, this is Lord Cecil Milnor, the First Luff of the Petrel, which is to carry us across the ocean," said Sir Grey Alstone, who looked younger, and certainly acted so, than when he was weighed down by the debts which his own follies had brought upon him, and his daughter's money had paid off.

The young noble bent low before Eve, and felt that he had never beheld a more beautiful face and form, while, sailor-like, he fell in love with her at the first glance, and congratulated himself that the Petrel, brig of war in his Majesty's service, had been selected for the pleasant duty of conveying Sir Grey and Lady Eve to America.

Once on board, and having domiciled themselves in their pleasant state-rooms, the baronet and his daughter went on deck to watch the receding shores of old England, for the vessel had at once weighed anchor after their arrival.

Lady Eve was presented to Captain Rupert Cuthbert, a jolly old sea-dog, who gave her a warm welcome, and added:

"I guess we'll not have such a rough run, Lady Eve, but what I can find time to win some of your father's pocket money, and Lord Cecil to fall in love with you, during the voyage.

"But you must watch him, Lady Eve, for he's a dangerous young man to flirt with."

Eve blushed and laughed, and Lord Cecil Milnor coming up at that moment, she entered into conversation with him, and found that, were she not already in love with Leon St. Vale, he would, indeed be a dangerous companion for a young girl, for he had a most fascinating manner, and a face that was as noble as it was fearless and handsome.

Greatly to her delight, Eve found that she was not to be a sufferer from sea-sickness, that curse of all ocean voyage to many, and many a lovely evening she spent in promenading the deck with Lord Cecil, while her father and the captain were playing cards in the cabin, and with the latter almost universally the winner.

It did not take much observation on the part of the maiden to see that Lord Cecil was really commander, the captain's indolent nature leaving all to his lieutenant, and that the young sailor was very popular with his brother officers and crew.

"Are you acquainted with Lieutenant Leon St. Vale, Lord Cecil?" asked Eve one night, when in mid-ocean.

"I know him well, Lady Eve, and a most thorough seaman and charming fellow he is," was the frank reply.

"It gives me pleasure to have you so speak of him, my lord, for he is a friend of mine."

A slight flush stole over the face of the young noble at these words, for he knew not how much that little word *friend*, with its big meaning, implied; but he answered:

"Then there is another tie between us, for Leon is my friend too, and no one felt more for his misfortune than I did."

"You refer to his duel with Lord Caverly?" she asked calmly.

"Yes, Lady Eve, for I believe they were most intimate friends, and St. Vale owed his life to Caverly."

"No, it was the other way; St. Vale saved Lord Caverly from death, and they never were intimate friends."

"Indeed! I am glad to know this; but I was on the African coast when it occurred, and got but a vague idea about it.

"I believe there was a woman in the case, Lady Eve?"

"I was the unfortunate cause, Lord Cecil."

The young sailor started for he had heard indeed an imperfect history of the duel, and little dreamed he was talking to the innocent cause.

"Forgive me, Lady, Eve, for blundering upon a subject that has given you pain, and punish me for it as you deem best," he said, humbly.

Eve laughed and held forth her hand in her frank way as a token of forgiveness, while she said:

"Perhaps we may meet Lieutenant St. Vale in America."

"I hopeso, surely, and doubtless we will, for he has been sent to the American shores, under the same orders we bear."

"May I ask what orders are the Petrel's?" said Eve.

"To hunt down the bold buccaneers who are doing such damage to English commerce and the mercantile fleets of the world."

"And you expect to render the king good service, Lord Cecil?"

"We should do so, for the Petrel is well-armed and equipped, and a swift craft, though not as good a sailer, I believe, as the Vulture, which is the name of the brig-of-war of which St. Vale is the lieutenant; but one or the other, I pray, will have the honor of capturing the scourge of the sea known as the Black Pirate."

"I have heard of the monster," said Eve, with a shudder.

"Who has not, for he boldly attacks even armed vessels, and has gone into American seaports and cut out merchant vessels under the very guns of the forts.

"He defies our cruisers, and threatens to hang the crew of any armed vessel that is sent in pursuit of him."

"God grant we do not meet the Black Pirate, then, after your fearful picture of him, Lord Cecil."

"I speak of him as he is, Lady Eve; but have no fear, for the Petrel is more than a match for him, and if we cannot whip him, we can run away from him."

"Sail ho!"

Lady Eve gave a violent start as the voice of the look-out at the mast-head rung out clear on the night air, and even Lord Cecil could not restrain a certain twinge of his nerves after what they had been talking about.

"Whereaway?" he however called out in ringing tones.

"Dead ahead, sir," came the answer.

"Can you make her out?"

"A brigantine, sir."

"Pardon me, Lady Eve," and Lord Cecil ascended the rigging, glass in hand.

Eve watched him narrowly as he bent a long, searching gaze at the stranger, and as he rejoined her, she asked:

"Well, Lord Cecil, is it a friend or foe?"

"It is too dark to see him well, Lady Eve;

but I shall prepare to receive a foe, and if he proves a friend there will be no harm done."

She felt that his answer was evasive, and that he knew what the vessel was, and, as he descended into the cabin, she stepped quickly to the companionway and distinctly heard the words addressed to the captain:

"She answers the description exactly of the Black Pirate, sir, and you know he was expected to be in this quarter, lying in wait for the king's treasure-ship with gold for the soldiers of the colony; but do not let Lady Eve suspect the nature of the craft."

This announcement of the young lieutenant was of more importance than the game of cards and at once brought Captain Cuthbert on deck followed by Sir Grey, who could not conceal his anxiety at what the stranger might prove to be.

Captain Cuthbert took a long look at the strange sail, now not half a league away, and sailing on a course to head off the Petrel, and said, emphatically:

"Lord Cecil, you are right."

"It is the Black Pirate then?" coolly said Eve.

"Why yes, Lady Eve, I believe it is; but how did you know it?" asked the captain.

"I overheard Lord Cecil's remark to you, Captain Cuthbert; but you will fight him of course."

"Under other circumstances, Lady Eve, I would be delighted to; but now—"

"You mean as I am on board you fear to risk the fight?" she said boldly.

"Yes, Lady Eve, that is just it, for my orders are to land your father and yourself in Halifax and then go after that buccaneer, if it is the one I think, and I believe I know his rig well enough to say that it is."

"Then, Captain Cuthbert, it is your duty, as a king's officer, to not let that knight of the Black Flag escape, and I request that you forget my presence and give him battle."

"But Eve, my child—"

"Father, I would never forgive myself if that pirate should escape now, so let Captain Cuthbert do his duty."

"Lady Eve, you've got more pluck than most men, and by old Neptune, but I will let you see a good fight, for yonder craft is the Black Pirate."

"Beat to quarters, Lieutenant Milnor, and we'll let that fellow know what our orders are."

The crew answered with a cheer the call to their guns, and in five minutes all was ready for the combat, and Eve Alstone reluctantly went below with her father, and upon entering the cabin found Sir Grey's valet and her maid crossing themselves in holy terror at the fear of the sea fight.

CHAPTER X.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

THE night was clear, and starlight was sufficient for those on the Petrel to get a full view of the stranger.

A light wind was blowing, and that the brigantine was fast was evident from the six knots which she seemed to be getting out of a four-knot breeze, while her long, narrow hull, lying low in the water, and tall, tapering masts, proved also that she was intended for extraordinary speed.

The glass showed her decks full of men, and at their guns, and a group of officers standing upon the quarter-deck.

Captain Cuthbert, who knew the brigantine by sight, was most anxious to get in close range ere he opened, for on several occasions he had known the pirate to escape when he found his foe's guns too heavy for him.

For some reason too the Black Pirate did not open fire, and only a few lengths separated the two beautiful, but saucy vessels, when Captain Cuthbert said:

"Lord Cecil, try your clear tenor upon him and find out what he says, please."

In trumpet-like tones they went across the waters from the lips of Lord Cecil Milnor:

"Ho the Brigantine, obey!"

"Ahoy the brig of war, Petrel," came back the answer in a commanding voice.

"By Heaven he knows us; try him again, my lord," cried the captain.

"What brigantine is that?" called out Lord Cecil.

"Is not that the British brig-of-war Petrel?" came back the response which, Yankee-like, answered a question by asking one.

"Ay, ay; who are you?"

"You are sent out by the king, especially to hunt down the Black Buccaneer?" was the question.

"Ay, ay; that is one purpose; who are you?" cried the young noble.

"The craft you are looking for!"

The strange replies of the brigantine's commander had caused all on board the Petrel to believe that a mistake had been made, and that he was not the Black Pirate; but now when he stood revealed under his own confession, there was a momentary excitement on the Petrel, and then came in Captain Cuthbert's hoarse tones:

"At your guns there, fire!"

The order was also heard on board the pirate, for suddenly the brigantine swung round on a change of course, and the broadside of the Petrel flew wild, while a volley of musketry came from the buccaneer crew, and with serious effect.

The next instant, with a skill that was marvelous, the pirate laid his vessel alongside of the brig-of-war, and over the bulwarks bounded a giant form with a black face, and at his back came scores of his wild crew with savage yells and fiercer mien.

But hardly had the Petrel's crew, headed by Captain Cuthbert and Lord Cecil, sprung to meet them, when a clarion-voiced pirate called out:

"Ho, senor! our foe comes!"

The startling cry momentarily checked every upraised arm, caused the finger on triggers to waver, and brought a dead silence.

But in that instant every pirate saw what seemed to strike a panic to their hearts, and the huge, black chief shouted:

"To your decks, buccaneers!"

With one accord they flung themselves pell-mell over the bulwarks, the lashings were cast loose, and the brigantine swung away ere the surprised crew of the Petrel could understand the cause or recover from their surprise.

But they were not long in doubt, for, as the brigantine shot clear of the brig, a line of fire ran down her hull, and her broadside poured forth its deadly storm of iron.

Yet, not upon the brig, but upon another foe, and that was a brig-of-war that was only a short distance away, and heading directly for the scene of combat.

At the fire of the buccaneer the new-comer's bowsprit was shot away, and the craft broached to, which caused a wild yell to come from the pirates' decks.

Going about at once, the Black Pirate squared away dead before the wind, and began a rapid flight, crowding on canvas, and at the same time pouring in a hot fire from his stern guns, at the two English vessels, for that the new-comer floated the English flag, the flash of the guns plainly showed.

"Pour your hail upon him, lads!" yelled Captain Cuthbert, and his crew did the best they could; but the brig had been stripped for action, the pirates had left their mark, and momentarily they were almost unnerved with astonishment.

But rallying, they quickly poured a fire after them, and Captain Cuthbert was giving orders to stand away in chase, when Lord Cecil said:

"Pardon, Captain Cuthbert; but that fellow showed how desperate he was, and we would have had a hard fight of it, but for the coming of the Vulture, for I recognize our consort, and as she cannot repair to follow under a couple of hours, suppose we transfer Sir Grey and his daughter to the brig, and we go in chase?"

"A good idea, my lord; hail them and ask what damage, and if they will allow the transfer, for we do not want to fight that Black Pirate with a lady on board, as I can now see."

Lord Cecil instantly hailed and the answer came back to his question, that the repairs would take some time, they had been in pursuit of the Black Pirate for several days, but would turn the chase over to the Petrel, and gladly receive Sir Grey Alstone and his daughter on board.

Instantly the boats were lowered, the baronet, who was delighted with the change, and Eve bade a hasty farewell, and in fifteen minutes after they were welcomed on board the Vulture by her commander, and away flew the Petrel in hot chase of the Black Pirate.

As soon as Eve's foot touched the deck she gazed eagerly around for the tall form of her sailor lover, Leon St. Vale; but nowhere was he visible and a look of anxiety and disappointment came over her beautiful face, just as her father unwittingly came to her aid with the remark, addressed to the Vulture's commander:

"Sir Roslyn, is not St. Vale an officer on your vessel?"

"He is, sir, or rather was; but God only knows what has become of him, as he went on board that craft five days ago, and we have not seen him since," said Sir Roslyn Stannix sadly.

Eve Alstone turned deadly pale at these words, and tried to speak; but her tongue could give no utterance to what she would say, and her father cried in deep surprise:

"Leon St. Vale on a board a pirate?"

"It is true, Sir Grey; but come into the cabin with me, and as soon as we have made yourself and daughter comfortable, I will tell you the particulars."

Eve gave a slight moan, for there was that in the words and manner of Captain Stannix that sent a chill of dread to her heart.

Silently she threw herself down upon a divan, and tried to smile her thanks as Sir Roslyn showed her the quarters that were to be her own, and told her to command himself and crew as though she were admiral.

At last, unable to bear longer the suspense, she said earnestly:

"Sir Roslyn, as Lieutenant St. Vale is a friend of ours, will you please relieve our minds

as to the meaning of your words, when you said he had gone on board the Pirate?"

"Certainly, Lady Eve, I will tell you all that I know."

"We were becalmed the other day, and toward afternoon a breeze came bearing down from the northward, and bringing with it as trim a looking merchant-craft as I ever saw, as I believed her to be."

"When within a league of us the wind died away, and we were both becalmed, and St. Vale, who had been most attentively examining the stranger, suggested taking the gig and running aboard the brigantine."

"I consented, and he departed, with four men and a coxswain."

"I saw him board, and a few minutes after I saw the boat coming back, and as it came near to our surprise we observed that St. Vale was not on board."

"It was dark when the boat reached us, and the coxswain handed me a note, which he said Lieutenant St. Vale had bade him give to me."

"It read, simply:

"This is the Black Pirate's brigantine, and I shall remain on board."

ST. VALE."

"As the wind was now freshening up we gave chase, and held on for days in sight, though we could not overtake the nimble-heeled rascal."

"To-day night he had dodged us, and we were looking for him, when suddenly we saw the Petrel and the Pirate close aboard of each other, and he beat a retreat at sight of us, and crippled us with his broadside; but Heaven grant that the Petrel overhaul him."

Eve thanked Sir Roslyn in a low tone, and unable to account for St. Vale's strange conduct, went to her state-room, and her maid disrobing her, she threw herself upon her bed and wept bitter, scalding tears.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLACK PIRATE.

WHEN Leon St. Vale had fled in unnerved terror from the cell in the cliff of Rock Ruin, he had only been anxious to place distance between himself and the ghastly secret that lay behind that stone door.

The sudden collapse of the skeleton form of his father, the rattle of the bones as they fell in a heap upon the rock flooring, and the rolling of the skull into the sea had completely unnerved him, brave as he was.

Had it been the bones of any other man than his father, whom he had so dearly loved and so sincerely mourned, he could have gazed upon them with compassion tinged with horror; but to be the bony form of his parent, whose death had been so cruel, so full of torture and ghastly anguish, made his suffering most poignant, and the chill at his heart took from it the cool courage, and hastily he had fled from the weird scene.

Returning on board his vessel he had seemed like a changed man toward his brother officers, and though he devoted himself to his duties, from the day the Vulture pointed her prow toward American shores, he yet had lost his bright smile, pleasant manner, and seemed to act like a piece of mechanism, rather than a human being.

Marv set down his changed manner to regret and remorse at the killing of Lord Aubrey Caver, and some pitied him; but when, after they had been weeks upon their voyage, and he had gone on board the supposed merchantman, and coolly written back word to his commander that it was the brigantine of the Black Pirate, the Sea Scourge, and that he should remain there, few knew what to think, while some slanderous tongues sowed the seed of calumny against him, and whispered that he had "turned buccaneer."

To none of his brother officers, however, had St. Vale told the secret of Rock Ruin, and it weighed like a nightmare upon him, as the reader can well understand.

Upon going in the gig to board the brigantine there was nothing about the craft that caused him to suspect her of being other than one of the trim American vessels that were then trading with England, and not until he went over her side did he discover that the guns were so arranged as to be run close into the bulwarks, where a slanting canvas covering fastened from the rail to the deck hid them from ordinary observation.

Also, instead of a score of seamen, which he had expected to behold, he saw a hundred crouching upon the decks.

To retreat was impossible, to cry out to the coxswain would cause his death and the destruction of the men in the boat, and with wonderful presence of mind and nerve he simply saluted, and said to an officer who greeted him:

"I know what you are, and sought this opportunity to join you; but my men know you only as a merchantman, so let them return with that idea while I remain."

The officer, an evil-faced man of forty, was evidently taken by surprise when he had expected to surprise, and replied:

"You know that this is the vessel of the Black Pirate?"

"I do, sir, and I desire to see your chief; but as yonder vessel of war, which is sent by

the king of England to hunt you down, believes you to be a merchantman, so let them continue to believe."

"But why should you, a king's officer, by your uniform, wish to ally yourself with pirates?"

"Crime has sent many a man to piracy: I killed a brother officer, and, when the secret is known the punishment will come, so I took this means of escape, as when cruising in the Gulf of Mexico a year ago I saw your vessel and recognized her."

"All right, sir, for we want good men, and it will be just like the chief to make an officer of you. Shall I dismiss your boat?"

"No, but permit me to write a line."

The pirate regarded him suspiciously, and St. Vale said quickly:

"It is for your eye, of course."

An ink-horn, with quill and paper, were brought, and St. Vale hastily wrote on the inner page the note the reader already knows the contents of.

Then he wrote:

"It is a merchant craft from America with the worst of contagious diseases on board, and, having boarded her, I will not return, especially as an officer is needed to take command."

"Will re-join you at New Orleans."

This note the pirate read and smiled, and folding it St. Vale carried it to the ship's side, and, pretending to give it to the coxswain, handed to him the other, and bade him return with it to the Vulture.

He had made a daring move, but felt that it was about the only one he could do under the circumstances, and that the Vulture would at once come in pursuit and the capture of the Black Pirate would follow.

"Come, sir, now I will lead you to the chief," said the pirate officer, and silently St. Vale followed him into the cabin.

Once down the companionway he started with horror at the scene that met his gaze, for though he knew well the fearful character of the Black Pirate, he had not expected to behold in him and his surroundings anything so terrible.

A table was spread in the cabin, and upon it were plates laid for eight.

At the head of the table, facing the companionway, sat a giant form, a huge negro with a cruel, brutal face, gold rings, diamond-studded, in his ears, his fingers covered with gems, and his large but splendid form arrayed in a dazzling uniform, while a cocked hat and plumes was upon his monstrous head.

Upon his right and left, on the three seats on either side of the table, were six skeleton forms, bolt upright, and with their bony fingers grasping a bottle in one hand, a glass in the other.

The foot of the table, just before St. Vale, was unoccupied, and as he started back, the Black Pirate called out:

"King's officer, you are welcome; take that seat and the Black Pirate and his guests will drink your health."

CHAPTER XII.

A PIRATE HOST.

THOUGH Leon St. Vale was wholly dumfounded at the view that suddenly presented itself before him, he did not lose his presence of mind.

Whatever might have met his startled gaze, could not have been so horrible to him as the scene in the Rock Ruin cell, and on board a buccaner craft, whose chief was known the seas over as a monster, he could not but be prepared for startling surprises and sickening sights.

With an effort he gained control of himself, and looking the smiling Black Chief squarely in the eyes, said, in an unruffled tone:

"It was to join you, captain, that I came on board, and I took big chances too; but I had not expected the honor of becoming so distinguished a guest."

"Don't mention it, my dear lieutenant, for such your uniform gives your rank, unless you are in disguise," and the chief looked fixedly at St. Vale, who could not but give him credit for hitting very near the truth when he spoke of being in disguise, as his motives certainly were, whatever his uniform denoted.

"Oh no, chief, I am an officer of the king, and was, until an hour ago, first luff on board His Majesty's brig-of-war Petrel, especially sent to the American coast to hunt you and other noted pirates off the seas."

"You will find my name and rank in the Admiralty's Register if you have one on board."

"Be seated, and when I have looked, I will present you to my guests," and the huge African touched a silver bell at hand.

A deformed negro, hideous to look at, and yet dressed in silk Persian garb, and wearing innumerable precious stones, at once appeared.

"Congo, my register of the British navy," said the chief, and the book was placed before him, the negro not even casting a glance at St. Vale.

"Your name is—"

"Leon St. Vale, captain."

The chief ran his finger down the list, and read aloud:

"Leon St. Vale, First Lieutenant; on duty off American coast, sloop-of-war Phoenix."

"Since then, sir, as that register is nearly a year old, I have been promoted, and assigned to the Vulture brig-of-war."

"Ah! you were promoted for leading a boat expedition against a pirate island, having chased the schooner into a haven where the Phoenix could not follow her, and you were successful?" and the chief eyed the officer closely.

"I did, sir," and St. Vale seemed surprised at the knowledge of the Black Pirate.

"That was one of my vessels, sir, and the island was my rendezvous, so you hit me a hard blow, yet I feel no ill will toward you."

"Had I been at the island with my brigantine the sloop could never have taken it; now why is it that a rising young officer leaves the king's navy to become a pirate?"

"I killed my rival, and—"

"Enough, sir: unpleasant complications may arise therefrom, and you prefer to live a pirate than die an honorable man; most of us have had cause for becoming what we are."

"Well, Lieutenant St. Vale, I am having a schooner built in America, that I will make you commander of, and in the mean time you can aid me on board the brigantine."

"Now permit me to present to you guests of mine, who were too honorable to leave behind them pirates' names," and he waved his hand toward the six hideous skeletons that were skillfully fastened into the chains upon either side of the table, and whose bony fingers grasped the flagon and glasses, as though pouring out wine.

St. Vale had already taken the seat assigned to him at the foot of the table, and in answer to the Black Chief's last remark, said:

"Permit me, sir, to suggest to you, that the Vulture will come down with the breeze now springing up, and she is a thoroughly armed and manned craft."

"Thank you for the suggestion, sir; you prove your loyalty to the new field you enter upon by it; but my lieutenant, Henrico Bonado, has the deck, and were the Vulture to get in range and he not prepared against it, my first act would be to string him up to the yard-arm, and my second, to fight my vessel."

"I rule with an iron hand and merciless heart, Lieutenant St. Vale," and the Black Chief smiled as though he had said something of a most pleasant nature.

St. Vale bowed at the hint of what he might expect as an officer of the Black Pirate, but made no remark, and the chief continued:

"There is a glass at your hand, Senor St. Vale, and your decanter faces you; fill up, please."

St. Vale calmly did so.

"Now, sir, to the introduction; the gentleman to your right is Captain De Lanier, of the French brig-of-war, *Le Diable*, sent after me."

"Instead of catching me, I caught him, and as he preferred death to becoming a pirate, I let him sit right there and quaff the draught, mixed with poison, that killed him."

"My surgeon, sir, is a man of superior skill in his art, and you see how well he has prepared the skeleton, so that Captain De Lanier is still my honored guest."

St. Vale did not move a muscle at this horrid story, but braced his nerves to hear more.

"This gentleman," and the Black Pirate pointed to the next skeleton to the unfortunate captain of the French brig. "This gentleman is an Englishman, sir, and you may have known him, as his name was Paul Vernon and a lieutenant—"

"Good God! poor Vernon!" cried St. Vale, unable to restrain himself.

"You knew him then?"

"I did, sir; we were middies together, and it was believed that his vessel, a schooner, sunk with all on board."

"Well, it must be pleasant for you to meet your old friend once more; but you are mistaken, sir, as regards his death, for I captured his craft, after a desperate action, in which he lost two thirds of his men."

"He was wounded, but my surgeon brought him round all right, and then, as he treated my offer of his life with contempt, had the pleasure of preparing his skeleton, as you see."

"The third on your right, Lieutenant St. Vale, is a Spaniard, and a lieutenant."

"He came on board my vessel to kill me, having volunteered for the work with two men, and I leave it to you whether he succeeded."

"One of his men told on him, and I strung him up and the surgeon made him presentable for a seat at my table."

"I keep him, as you see, upon my left, for he needs watching."

"The one on your left is a Spanish commodore who landed with a force on my island, and got captured, and few of his men reached their vessels again, for I was prepared for their coming."

"I made him take his own life by drinking poison, and he did it like a man; the surgeon did the rest for him, as you see."

"Senor Ricardo, the second on your left, is a Mexican, and was an officer under Lafitte, which gave him the idea that I should be an officer under him."

"We quarreled, and he tried to drive a

knife in my heart, and got the blade turned upon himself."

"This gentleman on my right is an American, and held a lieutenantcy in the navy of the United States."

"He attacked me with his schooner, and finding that I was sinking him, took to his boats and boarded me, and tried to take my own vessel from me, and, by Satan's wand of sin nearly succeeded."

"His men, at his order, refused to cry for quarter, and were cut down, while he was spared."

"You see what I spared him for?"

"Now my dear St. Vale, you know my guests, and I sincerely hope that you will never occupy the seat you now do in the same skeleton form."

There was that in the tone and manner of the Black Chief to prove to Leon St. Vale that his story was taken with suspicion, and he felt that the slightest word, or mistake on his part, would make him a skeleton guest of the Black Pirate, with those on either side of him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHASE.

I WILL now return to the Petrel, in her chase of the Black Pirate.

Being free to fight, without any fear of the results, on account of the presence of Sir Grey Alstone and Eve on board, Captain Cuthbert at once gave orders that all sail should be set in chase, and that the vessel should be put in perfect fighting trim.

Most anxious to carry into Halifax the famous pirate, Lord Cecil Milnor, the daring and energetic young lieutenant, devoted himself to his work with the greatest ardor, determined to win favor in the eyes of Eve, whom he would have been most loth to have given up, if he had not believed her to be in the greatest danger on board the Petrel, should the Black Pirate fight with the ferocity for which he was noted.

But though they held the brigantine in full view, a stern chase is proverbially a long one, and daylight dawned with the Black Pirate steadily holding his own.

He had squared away directly west, and as a good breeze was blowing, was bowling along at an eight-knot rate, while the brig, though not gaining, was certainly not losing, and was just out of gunshot range dead astern.

"If we could only gain on him enough to make him alter his course, then he would see what the Petrel can do on the wind," said Lord Cecil to his commander.

"He beats us this way, my lord, for we've got all set that will draw, and he has not," and the captain shook his head.

"True, sir, but if the wind changes, we can show him the Petrel may have a better point for sailing than before the wind."

"I am afraid that brigantine has, too, for she's as trim as a coquette's slipper, lies deep in the water, and sails as if the devil commanded her, and, from all accounts, I believe he does."

Both the captain and Lord Cecil anxiously watched their vessel and the pirate all day, and yet neither could note the slightest change in the distance of the two to each other.

"It is strange that he does not fight us, when he seemed so determined in his attack on us before the Vulture came," said Captain Cuthbert.

"It is not because he fears us, I am sure; well, we will soon find out what his intentions are, I hope."

But still the wind kept up its steady blowing from the east, and thus held on for another forty-eight hours, which brought the two vessels within a few hundred miles of the American coast.

Then the Black Pirate, just after sunrise one morning, suddenly changed his course and went merrily bowling along with the wind on the port quarter.

Captain Cuthbert and Lord Cecil were at breakfast at the time, but both hastened on deck, and the brig was headed in the same direction, though not so close-hauled, in an endeavor to keep pace with the pirate, and at the same time creep a little nearer.

"As I said, my lord, he sails on this course as well as on the other; ay, better, for he is dropping us."

More canvas was now spread on the brig, and then she just held her own with the brigantine, which had some sails to spare.

"We want a fierce blow, and then our larger hull will do better work in the rough water," said Lord Cecil.

"I don't know, for he lays very deep; but the blow we'll soon have," and the captain pointed to the eastern horizon, where clouds were gathering.

But the storm held off for that day, and just at nightfall the wind rose and sent the two vessels along at a merry pace, the Black Pirate again squaring away before the breeze, as though anxious to get nearer the American coast.

"He'll hold on and dodge us in some of the inlets of the American coast, for which he is heading," said Captain Cuthbert.

And so seemed the pirate's intention, for he held on, though the gale increased, until it

seemed that he must run his sharp-bulled brigantine under the waves, driving her before the wind, for even the larger brig was in danger.

But Lord Cecil, who had the deck, would not take in an inch of canvas, and his heart held hope all the time that the pirate would lose her sticks, or meet with some other mishap, that would enable them to get within range.

"Eight days' steady chase, and nearly two thousand miles run, and we are not a cable's length nearer to him than when we left the Vulture," said Lord Cecil, despondently.

"Nor a cable's length further astern, my lord; but—"

"Land, ho!"

The voice rung out clear from the foretop.

"Whereaway?"

"One point off the starboard bow, sir; it opens like a bold coast," answered the look-out.

"Ay, ay, my man. Now, my lord, that fellow has timed himself well, for he comes in sight of the coast of Maine, off which we are, just at sunset, and will elude us, as I feared, by running into some of the inlets."

"By Heaven! but we are in for it! All hands ahoy! to take in sail!" suddenly cried Lord Cecil, as glancing astern, he beheld a hurricane sweeping down upon them.

Instantly the rigging was alive with busy seamen, and the brig was stripped of all but stern-sails, and bore round to meet the tempest just as it burst upon her.

The shock was fearful, and for a moment all believed the stanch craft would never rise from beneath the weight of waters upon her.

Then followed a cracking of timbers, the bursting of sails with cannon-like report, stern orders, a cry or two, and the Petrel arose from her peril and faced the furious gale.

But in that awful moment her foretopmast had gone, snapped short off, her sails were rent, a boat had been wrenched from the davits, and several of her crew had been washed overboard.

"We must lay to, my lord, and ride it out," cried Captain Cuthbert, turning to where he had last seen Lord Cecil.

"By Heaven! where is he? Who has seen Lord Cecil Milnor?" he called through his trumpet.

But no voice answered, and with a groan Captain Cuthbert turned to rescue his vessel from her peril, for he knew that one of those who had been swept off by the fierce waves, was his brave lieutenant whom he loved as his own son.

CHAPTER XIV. DOOMED.

HAVING gotten his vessel well under hand, and snugly laying to, Captain Cuthbert set about repairing damages as well as he was able, anxious to be busy to keep his thoughts from flying over the wild waters with his noble young lieutenant.

For several hours the storm continued with unabated fury, the night being intensely dark, and the men fearful that perhaps their fate might yet be to follow their comrades, whom the cruel sea had dragged off upon its waves to a death in the ocean depths.

But shortly before dawn the storm blew itself out, the clouds broke up, and as the gray of morning stole over the waters, a relief came to every heart.

But just then the keen eye of the look-out descried a dark object upon the waters, and he called out lustily:

"Sail ho!"

There was no need to ask whereaway, for the captain and all of the crew caught sight of the vessel, and a score of voices cried:

"The Black Pirate!"

It was true, for, not half a mile away, snugly laying to, as though in no ways inconvenienced by the storm, the brigantine was now distinctly visible.

If they had discovered the Petrel, no sign on board made it known, and Captain Cuthbert, anxious to drown thought by action, at once gave orders to reef down and set sail, and for the men to go to the guns.

"We cannot attempt boarding now," he said to the officer who took Lord Cecil's place; "but we can perhaps cripple him and keep near, so as to run down to him when the sea falls."

But, as the Petrel stood in the direction of the pirate, it became evident that she had been seen, for there was still no confusion on board, and the crew were coolly setting sail, as though utterly regardless of the cruiser's presence.

A few moments after the corsair also got under way, and to the surprise of those on the brig, stood down to meet her.

"Has the fellow decided to strike and hope for mercy, finding himself under our guns?" said Captain Cuthbert, with amazement.

Almost instantly an answer as to his intentions came from on board the pirate, for luffing up he sent a broadside upon the Petrel that hit hard and did considerable damage.

Wearing round, as though on a pivot, the pirate vessel then delivered her other broadside, almost before the Petrel's crew could recover from their surprise.

Now rung the orders from Captain

Cuthbert to fire, for half a dozen of his men lay on the deck, a starboard forward gun was dismounted, and the aim of the pirate had proven too true to allow trifling with him.

With the roar of the guns of the brig came the stern order of the Black Pirate, shouted in tones that needed no trumpet's aid:

"Boarders ahoy! we'll take that fellow with the knife!"

"Great God! will he attempt to come alongside in this fierce sea?" cried Captain Cuthbert.

"It seems so, sir, for I see the Black Chief in the bow, with his men at his back," answered the lieutenant to whom the captain had addressed his remark.

"It will sink both vessels, and we have but one thing to do, curse him!" impatiently said Captain Cuthbert.

"And that is, sir?"

"To run for it, until the sea goes down and then turn and fight him."

This seemed to be the only course for him to pursue, to avoid the collision of the two vessels, which would send both vessels to the bottom, in all probability, for the Black Pirate appeared bent on boarding, and was reckless enough to attempt it.

Instantly the brig swung round, and her men sprung into the rigging and hastily set what sail she could stand up under, with half a gale blowing.

The pirate was not a quarter of a mile away, and the movement of the brig caused a wild yell to break from the lips of her savage crew, and it reached the ears of those on the Petrel.

"Oh, you may yell, you devils, for it is a strange sight for a king's craft to be running from an accursed pirate; but just wait until we see that it is not sudden death to board you, and we'll change that cheer to a howl," said the infuriated Englishman.

And a strange sight indeed it was, to see the brig, larger, carrying more guns, and fully a score more men than the pirate, flying away from him with all speed.

Yet, feeling that the reckless chief would board, Captain Cuthbert dared not risk the coming together of the two vessels in that mad sea.

But the pirate had no idea of allowing his foe a peaceful flight, for his heavy bow-gun mounted on the forecastle at once began to play upon the Petrel, which returned the fire from her stern-guns, which were, however, of lighter caliber than the thirty-two of the corsair, and consequently did less harm.

As the brigantine soon showed herself to be the fastest vessel, the pirate caused his belmsman to luff sharp up every mile run and bring his port broadside to bear with disastrous effect, and regaining headway once more, continue firing from his bow-chaser.

In this way the brig was getting the effects of a broadside every now and then, and the almost continual fire of the heavy thirty-two, which was a galling storm of iron to receive, where she could only return it with the two twelves she had on her stern.

Often did Captain Cuthbert and his men glance over the waters to notice the running down of the sea, which would enable the brig to go about and board the pirate, without fear of both vessels going down with the shock.

But two hours had passed, and still the Petrel was forced to fly; but her captain sail grimly: "Another half-hour and we'll risk it, Sanford."

Hardly had the words left his lips before the pirate luffed suddenly, and his broadside came hurtling after the brig.

Down to the deck went Lieutenant Sanford, and one of the stern guns was dismounted; while a dozen of the crew fell to rise no more.

"By Heaven! this is fearful! Stand ready all! ready about!"

With the ringing order of Captain Cuthbert the Petrel swung round, and the next instant, close-hauled on the back track, she was heading to meet her reckless adversary.

The sea yet ran fearfully high to risk boarding; but Captain Cuthbert would fly no longer, for he had but one lieutenant remaining and a score of his crew were gone, so that he felt he must act promptly.

And the Black Pirate seemed nothing loth, but with a look of viciousness the saucy vessel came dashing on to meet her foe.

There were a few rapid shots from both bows, a port broadside from one, a starboard broadside from the other, stern orders from their commanders, a sudden luffing up of both, and the two helms came together with a shock, their heads to the wind, and the iron grappels were thrown and readily made fast upon each craft, showing that the crews, pirate and man-of-war's men, knew that it must be a fight to the death.

Rocking wildly, with volumes of water dashing up between the hulls and deluging the decks, striking hard against the fenders, with shocks that made each hull tremble, and with desperate men struggling to board the deck of their foes, the scene was one of awful ferocity.

But, accustomed to just such wild scenes, the pirates held the mastery, and the deck of the Petrel became the scene of fierce conflict, instead of the corsair's deck the battle-ground, as Captain Cuthbert had intended.

Headed by their giant chief the pirates cut down their foes on all side, and the losses of the crew of the Petrel having made their numbers equal they began to drive before their inevitable advance the man-of-war's men, in spite of the mad struggle to hold them at bay.

"For God's sake, men, hold them!" cried Captain Cuthbert, bareheaded, and a wound in his forehead covering his face with blood, but only maddening him to greater energy in the fight.

Cheered by their leader the Petrel's crew again made a desperate rush forward, and for a moment bore back the pirates; but only for a moment, as to their front sprung the Black Chief, and one sweep of his huge cutlass laid three of the king's men upon the deck.

"Devils! you were hunting me to hang me, were you?"

"Well, you have found me, and by Satan's scepter, I'll hang you to your own rigging," yelled the giant black, as, his uniform crimsoned with life-blood, his eyes burning, and his white teeth glittering, he dashed forward into the very midst of his foes, who gave way in terror before the advance of what seemed a very demon of the deep.

CHAPTER XV. THE KING'S ORDERS.

SEEING his men giving way before the advance of the terrible Black Pirate, and knowing that if he did not check them all would be lost, Captain Cuthbert threw himself to the gap to face the chief, and called upon his crew to rally around him.

They made a noble effort to obey; but this very effort served to arouse the Black Pirate and his men to greater frenzy and they bounded forward with demoniacal yells, enough to strike terror to the stoutest heart, and the Petrel's brave lads were again forced before them.

"Die here, men, for you are on your own deck!" shouted Captain Cuthbert, and his men cheered his brave words and again pressed forward to stem the inevitable avalanche of mad humanity that was rushing upon them.

But suddenly their brave leader sunk to the deck, and with shrieks of joy the pirates again rushed forward, and in dismay the Petrel's crew fled from before them.

"Mercy! for the love of God, mercy!"

Such was the shriek that went upon every side, and then came the answer of the Black Pirate:

"My men are mostly Spaniards, and do not know the meaning of the English word mercy."

"But you understand it, so call your bloodhounds off," shouted a young officer, the one in command, after the fall of Captain Cuthbert, and springing forward he boldly faced the huge chief.

"I understand the meaning of the word, sir, but I am more merciless than my crew, who do not," was the cool response of the Black Pirate.

"Then you are indeed all a set of bloodhounds," said the young officer.

"Yes, sir; that is just what we are; but do you command this vessel now?"

"I am a prisoner, sir, but the ranking officer over my crew, what few I see your men have spared."

"Very well, then as the commander I beg to ask you the name of your vessel?"

"The Petrel, brig of war, belonging to His Majesty, King of England."

"Yes, I have heard that such a vessel was to be sent at a stated time, to hunt down the pirates on the American shores."

"You have heard right, and that was the order given the captain of this vessel."

"Well, it seems the biters are bitten," and the Black Pirate smiled grimly, while the young officer made no reply.

"What report shall I send your king?" asked the chief, after a moment of silence.

"That we did our duty, but Fate was against us."

"I being Fate," and once more the Black Pirate smiled blandly.

"You are a cruel monster, fully equal to all that has been said of you," was the bold reply of the Englishman.

"I am, sir, just what I am painted, and the coloring is not put on too strong, as you shall discover."

"But now tell me what your orders were, for I am anxious to go back on board my vessel, as I see that another storm is threatening," and turning to an under officer he ordered him to thoroughly search the Petrel for anything of value, and carry what was found on board the brigantine.

"Now, sir, your orders were—"

"Especially to hunt down the Black Pirate and his crew."

"And then, sir?"

"To hang them to the yard-arms of their own vessel, from you down."

"That order of the king I shall carry out, but with his crew, not mine."

"You and your men, sir, have but a few minutes to live," was the cruel response.

"What! would you hang us?" cried the young officer.

"Most certainly; every man of you that is

now alive shall ornament the rigging of your own craft."

"Good God! would you be so vile a brute?"

"You shall see, sir; ho there, men, rig chains in the rigging of this craft for the hanging of these men!"

As if in no way surprised at the order of their chief, the pirates sprung to obey with alacrity, and in a very short while the yard-arms, gaff and bowsprit, even, had small chains swinging from them.

"As commander, sir, you shall swing from the gaff," said the Black Pirate, and at a wave of his ring-studded hand his crew seized the young officer, manacled his hands behind his back, and dragged him aft.

At the same time his crew were also ironed, and the chains fastened closely around their necks.

There were some cries for mercy, a few prayers, a curse or two from the most reckless, but stern, fearless silence from the young officer, who sought to show his crew and foes how he could die.

"Will you not beg for mercy, sir?" sneered the Black Pirate.

"For my crew, yes; for myself, no!"

"Would you have me spare them?"

"Yes, for they were but obeying orders, and going where their duty as seamen called them."

"I will spare any of them who will join my crew."

"What say you, men?" and the Black Pirate called out to the crew of the Petrel.

Some looked at him a scornful refusal, others never raised their heads to reply, and a few, with shame-flushed faces, accepted his terms.

"Knock their irons off, and send them on the brigantine," ordered the chief.

Hastily the seamen who had purchased their lives with their dishonor, slunk from the sight of their indignant messmates, whom they dared not wait to see die.

"I have spared some of them, sir," and the chief again turned to the young officer.

"Yes, those who dared not face death, and such men are only fit to be pirates."

"By heavens! but your nerve pleases me, and your king shall know how you died, for I shall send my report that I turned his cruiser into a gallows-ship."

"Ready all! up with them!"

And up into the air went the brave young officer and over a score of gallant tars, to strangle to death before the eyes of their foes.

But, as though nature rebelled in anger at the cruel deed, suddenly a terrific peal of thunder fairly shook the sea, and vivid flashes of lightning rent the gathering clouds asunder.

"To the brigantine, you hounds, for the hurricane is upon us."

"Cast loose those grapnels! into the rigging there and furl that canvas."

"Lively, you devils, or you'll follow those swinging corpses beneath the sea," yelled the Black Pirate in trumpet tones, and so nimbly did his crew spring to obey, that the two vessels swung apart, and the brigantine was reefed close before the tempest struck it.

They saw the Petrel career far over as the wind and waves swept down upon it, and then all was darkness upon the face of the deep, for the inky clouds and gale-driven spray turned day into darkness.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LEAP FOR LIFE.

THAT Leon St. Vale felt that he was abiding over a powder magazine with a lighted match in hand and the kegs open, it took him a very short while to find out, after his going on board the pirate brigantine.

He saw that the huge negro was a man of education, and a most thorough seaman, but from whence he had come not one of his crew seemed to know.

Yes, there was one exception, and that was Congo, his deformed body-servant; but the man had not been found on board with courage enough to question that hideous monster in the shape of a human being.

As for the chief, he called himself simply Captain Ebony, a very appropriate name, St. Vale thought, and rather encouraged the belief among his crew that he was half man, half devil.

He certainly acted upon the superstitious feelings of the ignorant men he commanded by his queer antics, ghastly guests and love of dead bones.

After his meal, which was invariably taken alone until St. Vale boarded the brigantine, if I except his skeleton companions, Congo was wont to range the ghastly sextette back against the cabin walls, and it was the wont of the chief to chat with them in a most friendly fashion, and sometimes, in conversing with the English lieutenant, he would turn and appeal to one of the bony forms his surgeon had so skillfully dressed, as though he expected an answer to his questioning.

That all this caused St. Vale the utmost abhorrence there is no question; but he had placed

himself in the lion's den, and could only strive to keep his head from between his jaws.

The steady chase of the Vulture Leon St. Vale had watched with eager interest, and noted that the pirate had it in his power to drop the brig when he wanted to, for he was compelled to confess he had never seen a more seaworthy and swift vessel than was the brigantine.

When they had dropped the Vulture and come upon the Petrel Leon St. Vale was in an agony of dread, for well he knew the brig by sight, and that it was the very craft that bore on board Sir Grey Alstone and Eve, as before leaving he had learned that they were to sail with Captain Rupert Cuthbert.

Though with all this dread at his heart, for he had seen enough of the brigantine, her commander and ferocious crew to know that they were a match for either the Vulture or Petrel, he had to play well his part with the Black Pirate, who said to him:

"If the Vulture were to capture us your neck would be snapped."

"No, I'd make some excuse about being prisoner to you," laughed St. Vale, though he felt little in humor for merriment.

Then came the attack upon the Petrel, and St. Vale had made up his mind that the Black Pirate should die by his hand rather than that his impious eyes should fall upon Eve, whom his glass had shown him upon the brig's deck, and it was with delight that the coming of the Vulture as she did, and which he had just desecrated, gave him a chance to call off the pirate crew to save themselves.

When chased by the Petrel, after seeing the transfer of Sir Grey and Lady Eve to the Vulture, Leon felt greatly relieved that the maiden was now out of danger, but feared greatly for the brig, as he was convinced from all he had seen that the Black Pirate was a foe that could not be taken unless by a vastly superior vessel and crew to what the brigantine was and was manned with.

Knowing that Eve, in the Vulture, had safely gone on to Halifax, Leon St. Vale had now changed his mind as to a plot he had on hand, and which will be developed as the story goes on, and determined to, in some way, leave the hated vessel at the first opportunity, for the Black Pirate had told him he was going to run down the coast of the United States from Portland to the Gulf of Mexico, where he expected to make many important captures.

The night that land was sighted on board the Petrel the reader will remember that a sudden hurricane swept down upon the brig in which Lord Cecil Milnor and several of the crew were carried off by the waves.

That same tempest Leon St. Vale had been carefully watching as it approached and, being on deck, and in charge of the brigantine at the time, he brought her round head to, to meet it.

Just before dark he had observed a small chebacca-boat, such as are often seen on the Maine coast, or rather were at that time, further inshore, and under bare poles, as though at anchor and trying to hide from the brigantine.

Not even the look-out on the pirate had seen the little craft, and as it was just in a line between the brigantine and the shore, and the coming tempest was bearing right toward it, St. Vale determined to make a desperate effort to escape from the deck of the buccaneer craft.

This effort he made, just as the hurricane struck the brigantine with terrific force, and a deluge of waters was sweeping the deck.

The first shock over, and, unseen by any one, he leaped into the sea, and was borne along upon the avalanche of waters, driven by the wind at terrific speed.

Suddenly in the foaming caldron something grasped his arm.

"Great God!" he cried, for he feared he had been seized by a shark, and instantly he whipped out a dirk from his breast-pocket.

"Don't kill me, sir."

In the glare of the phosphorescent waters he saw a face looking into his own, and knew that it must be one of the brigantine's crew, swept off by the waves, and he answered:

"I do not intend to kill you, my man; but you must release your grasp upon me."

The poor wretch could only catch the words, amid the howling wind and roaring waters, that told him to release his hold of the arm he had grasped with drowning energy, and shrieked forth:

"Oh sir, if I do, I shall die, for I cannot swim."

"Release me, I say!"

But the terrified man threw his arms around St. Vale's neck and cried piteously:

"Save me; oh save me, sir!"

"I cannot, for your weight will drown both of us."

"Release me!" was the stern response.

But the drowning wretch clung but the closer and they both sunk beneath a rolling wave.

At length one arose to the surface and steadied himself as well as he could upon the top of the driving waters.

That one was Leon St. Vale, and his knife was gone, for it was buried in the heart of the drowning pirate.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

It was a hard thing to do, to drive a knife to the heart of one who clung to him, begging him to save him from death; but Leon St. Vale saw that he must rid himself of the human burden he carried, or sink with him.

In his mad terror the man would not release his hold upon him and a struggle for mastery would but tire him out, so he must act promptly and deep into the broad breast went the keen blade.

Rising to the surface, St. Vale found that the fury of the hurricane had passed on ahead, and that he was in the flow of the tempest, yet still driven on at great speed.

He had the bearings of the chebacca-boat well in his mind, and felt that he must be near it, and eagerly he gazed into the mist ahead of him.

A bold swimmer, having never met his equal, and once having swum for hours in a gale, when washed overboard from his vessel, he had felt confidence in reaching the little craft, if not driven by it in the darkness and storm, and then he knew he had to take his chances of reaching some of the small islands he had observed along the coast before the sun had set.

In either case he understood fully the desperate chances he had taken; but to remain on the Black Pirate's vessel was even worse, for he knew that there was a suspicion upon him which might break forth at any moment, while, if the brigantine captured the brig, he would be forced to behold her crew cruelly put to death, unable to aid them, and perhaps forced to be master of ceremonies at their execution, for he did not doubt but that the chief would put him to some such test as this to try his loyalty to the black flag he professed to have adopted.

These thoughts and conclusions had caused Leon St. Vale to take the desperate chance of reaching the chebacca boat, or failing in that, of trying to gain the coast, five leagues from where the brigantine was at the time the hurricane struck her.

His eyes were therefore kept strained for a sight of the little craft, and at last, just as he had given up all hope of seeing it, and believed he had been driven by in the darkness, he rose on a mighty wave, and sighted a dark object a few points to the port, and half a dozen cable-lengths away.

Another wave coming along the next instant, and the dark object took the shape of a hull and masts.

He shouted with joy at the discovery and struggled manfully in an oblique course to reach the little craft, at the same time hailing loudly, to rouse any one to his aid, and prevent his driving by.

But though he neared the craft no answer came to his hail, and he grew too hoarse to cry out more, and felt that he was weakening himself thereby, and keeping silent devoted his every energy to the struggle.

On the wild waters drove him, and slightly nearer to the craft his tremendous exertions brought him, yet it seemed as though he could not reach it.

To be driven past there he knew was certain death, for he was becoming utterly worn out and must sink from exhaustion long ere he could reach the coast.

With this thought seething through his brain, he worked like a giant, and crept nearer the chebacca boat, though he was swiftly driving landward with the gale.

Nearer and nearer, and yet seemingly so far away.

One more loud hail he gave, and yet no answer came from the boat.

He could see the craft bounding wildly over the passing waves at times, and then burying her bows deep beneath them.

That she was at anchor he knew, and concluded, as her decks were deluged with water, her crew, trusting in her perfect seaworthiness, had gone below to keep from being washed overboard.

He knew therefore that he could only depend upon himself for safety, and like the bold man he was, he set his heart in his task, determined not to die, but to live.

Nearer and nearer the chebacca boat, and yet nearer and nearer the coast, until at last the little craft was not thirty feet away.

But would he reach it, with that mad torrent driving him by at race-horse speed?

Putting forth a giant effort, and not yielding to fatigue, though he felt as though his very head would burst, he grasped, just as he was going by, the cable of the port anchor, for she had both hooks out, and though it lacerated his hand, he held on.

Another effort, and he got a firmer gripe, and then, as a huge wave bounded over the sharp bows, he went with it, grasped the mast, held on until it was gone by, and tottering aft, fell almost fainting into the cockpit, his strength, his energy, utterly gone from him.

But he had dragged himself out of the depths, a staunch though small deck was beneath him, and he was safe.

Utterly prostrated by his long and terrific struggle, Leon St. Vale sunk into a deep, dream-

less slumber, and he only awoke when a flood of light streamed in his face, and he heard the words:

"Messmates, the blow is over, and the Kittywink has stood it well; but I don't want to be caught in another such a gale, and have to ride it out and trust in our mud-hooks."

"It was that cursed pirate, Pete, that caused us to get caught, for if we hadn't dropped sail to hide from him, we could have been in the Kennebec before the gale struck us."

"That's so, Jack; but I, for one, don't want no more such gales, nor any pirates, and I hope that one has gone to Davy Jones's locker."

"Not he, for pirates don't sink in gales, as their ships is all made storm-proof by witches afore they sail."

"That's so. I wish they'd do as much for the Kittywink."

"No, you don't, messmate; we don't want no witch work on board our little craft."

Every word of this conversation was distinctly heard by Leon St. Vale, as he lay back in the shadow of the cockpit, half under a canvas awning which had been torn from its fastening by the waves.

The speakers he saw, one of them standing in the companionway, one hand upon the top of each of the doors, which he held half open.

His face was a bold one, and not unkindly, and he was dressed in a rough sailor suit.

His companion, who sat back in the cabin, was similarly dressed, but St. Vale could not see his face.

Just as he had made up his mind that the little craft was a fishing-smack, and these two were all that were on board, a strange voice cried:

"Well, lads, you do believe in witches, then?"

"I do, of course," said one.

"I guess I'll never be that full of learning not to believe in 'em, Billy Piper," responded the other.

"Nor will I, for if there are wizards, there must be witches, and I have seen the former," said the man addressed as Billy Piper, and who was not visible to Leon St. Vale.

"You have seen 'em, Billy?" asked one.

"Yes, for I was a prisoner to that scourge of the seas, the Black Pirate, and he is a wizard, I'll swear, for if he wants good weather he gets it; if he wants a storm it comes, and his crew say he's kin to the devil."

"How did he capture you, Billy?" asked one, while St. Vale felt fully competent to agree with Billy Piper as regarded the Black Pirate's kinship to Satan.

"Ahl it was when I was in the Cuban trade, you know."

"He captured our vessel, killed all on board 'cepting me, and robbed her of her cargo and scuttled her."

"How came he to spare you, Bill?"

"I happened to know one of his officers, who recognized me, for we were boys together in Boston, and begged for my life, and Captain Ebony, that is the Black Pirate, said he'd spare me if I'd turn buccaneer."

"And you did?"

"Of course I did, and I tried hard to make him believe I was the most bloodthirsty devil on board; but the strange sights I saw in my cruise with him made me slip my piratical cable the first chance I got, and I've been afraid of salt water ever since, and when I recognized his brigantine this afternoon, I thought we were all gone up, and we would have been if he'd have seen us."

"Don't you think, messmates, we'd better run in now, as the gale is blown out, and the next time I take the trip from Portland to the Kennebec, I'll walk."

The man standing in the companionway had become interested in the story of the former captive of the Black Pirate, and re-entered the cabin, and in the laugh that followed Billy Piper's determination, to walk from Kennebec to Portland rather than go to sea again, Leon St. Vale arose with an effort and stepped within full view of those in the cabin.

The light from the swinging lamp fell full upon his haggard face, his shirt front was red with blood his violent efforts to reach the chebacca-boat had forced from his mouth and nose, and he was certainly a startling looking personage, to appear like an apparition from the deep before the three men.

With a wild cry the man nearest to him bounded to the furthest end of the cabin; echoing the whoop of alarm the other, who had been seated at the table, dove under it, upsetting his chair, while Billy Piper, who had been lying in a bunk, threw himself on the furthest side, and drew the shuck mattress over him.

"Don't be alarmed, messmates, for I am human," said St. Vale, laughing in spite of himself at the fright he had caused.

"Where did you come from?" gasped Jack Shepley, gaining courage at hearing his voice.

"Out of the sea."

"Ask him if he's Father Neptune or the devil!" called out Pete Pearson from under the table.

"I am from off the Black Pirate's brigantine," said St. Vale, anxious to bring the colloquy to an end.

Instantly his words caused a radical change in all, for Billy Piper emerged from the bunk, Peter Pearson soared upward from under the table, and Jack Shepley sprung forward, a pistol leveled at the young officer, and cried sternly:

"Then, sir pirate, you are my prisoner!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRANGE RECEPTION.

It was certainly a startling surprise to Leon St. Vale, to find that his assertion that he had just come from the Black Pirate brigantine should be interpreted into his being one of the vile crew.

That his words had created a feeling against him, bitter in the extreme, was very evident, as all the men on the chebacca-boat now covered him with their weapons, and the slightest movement on his part would have ended his life then and there.

But he stood the ordeal without flinching, and said calmly:

"Messmates, as I said I came from the Black Pirate's vessel, but I was a prisoner on board."

"Aha!" said Jack Shepley, but what he meant by it no one seemed to understand by his manner or the word, and St. Vale continued:

"I am a British naval officer, and boarded the brigantine the other day in a calm, believing it to be one of your swift and pretty American trading vessels."

"I found out my mistake upon seeing the Black Pirate, and darkness coming on, and with it a breeze springing up, the brigantine escaped from the Vulture, my vessel, which was one of the two vessels sent out by His Majesty to hunt for pirates."

"The other, the Petrel, engaged the pirates in a short action and escaped, and has been pursued by her ever since; but seeing your vessel stripped of canvas late this afternoon, observing that no one else on the brigantine saw her, I took advantage of the gale that struck her and jumped overboard and here I am."

"Now, messmates, a fellow-seaman in distress asks your hospitality."

There was that in the frank manner and fearless face of Leon St. Vale that won the confidence of his hearers, and they as frankly bade him welcome, for now that they knew he was alive, they felt that he could have no motive in boarding them, and that his danger on the brigantine must have been great indeed, to cause him to take the risk of the sea to reach them.

Pete Pearson readily found some rum on board, and a meal was set out for the daring officer, who gave the three men a history of his experience on board.

"You see, lieutenant, this is a little craft, and her cargo isn't very valuable; but she belongs to Pete and myself here, and we trade between the Kennebec and Portland, and occasionally get a passenger, like Billy Piper here, which helps the pot to boil at home."

"But we don't want to lose that little, and as my two messmates were asleep, and I wasn't very far from it, for I can doze and steer, too, I didn't see the brigantine until near at hand, and Billy Piper swore it was the Black Pirate, and he ought to know, as you heard him tell the story, you say, while you was lying in the cockpit."

"Well, we stripped her quick, and trusted our bare poles wouldn't be seen, and not daring to hoist sail, we had to drop hooks and ride out the gale which the Kittywink did prime, as you see; but now we'll set the cloth on her and head for port, and you is welcome to our berth, and we have a few pieces of silver to carry you on to Canada, if you need them."

"My good fellow, I am amply supplied with funds, and shall pay you liberally for my passage."

"You won't do no such thing, lieutenant, for we don't make the pot boil off of shipwrecked sailors."

"But I shall have to pay some one to run me round Cape Sable to Halifax, and I think you can make a little more by it than one of your Portland and Kennebec voyages will bring you."

"Wall, as to that, I guess the Kittywink can be chartered, if you'll give us time to run into Kennebec first."

"Certainly, take your own time, and if I can catch a vessel going to Halifax you need not make the run unless you wish to."

"We'll make it, and not be hard on you either, lieutenant, and you'll find the Kitty-

wink a bird for sailing," and Jack Shepley went on deck, and soon after Leon St. Vale had an opportunity to see that the skippers had not praised their little vessel too highly, for she fairly flew over the rough waters on her way into port, after her narrow escape from capture by the Black Pirate, and shipwreck in the fierce tempest.

Having unloaded their cargo, and bidden Billy Piper farewell, with the assurance from him that he would walk rather than take the sea trip again, the skipper, mate and crew, all in two persons, got the Kittywink under way for Halifax, and the second day out as Leon St. Vale came on deck he found the little vessel flying with all speed from a strange sail that was in sight.

One glance at the stranger, whom both Jack Shepley and Pete Pearson had pronounced "another bloody pirate," and the young officer cried eagerly:

"Ready about, lads; that vessel is no pirate, but the Vulture, on board of which I am first Luff."

"Head for her, and you'll save yourselves a long voyage, and get full pay in the bargain, as though you had made the run to Halifax."

"Are you certain, lieutenant?" asked the cautious Jack, eying the vessel very closely.

"Yes, are you certain it's the Vulture, sir?" echoed Pete.

"Do you know your own mother's face when you see it, my lads?"

"I don't, for the old lady's been dead since I were a kid," said Pete.

"I does, God bless the old lady," responded Jack.

"Well, I know yonder craft as well, so ready about, and head for her," and Leon St. Vale himself sprung to the tiller.

The Vulture in the mean time was holding on her course to the northward, having evidently been blown far to the south by the gale, and sighting the coast was running for Halifax.

The Kittywink shook out all of her reefs, in spite of the stiff breeze that was blowing, and St. Vale placed her on the port tack to cross the forefoot of the Vulture, and drawing nearer signaled to her that they wanted to speak with her.

Half an hour after the young officer had paid the two skippers for his trip, bidden them farewell, and sprung over the side of the Vulture, which continued on her course while the Kittywink went flying back to her loved Kennebec.

Seated in the cockpit, and with a sailor's tarpaulin and rough pea-jacket on, no one had recognized Leon St. Vale until he suddenly sprung upon the deck, and then all who saw him gave a sudden start, while Lieutenant Kent Lomax, the officer who had stepped into his place, and who liked not his return, said sneeringly:

"Well, sir pirate, have you come back to beg your king's mercy?"

Instantly the good right arm of the returned officer went out straight from the shoulder, and Kent Lomax measured his length upon the deck, while St. Vale walked aft, and raising his tarpaulin to Captain Stannix, Sir Grey Alstone and Lady Eve, who had not yet recognized him, and who stood in a group on the quarter deck, said calmly:

"Sir Roslyn, I have to report my return, sir, and also, I regret to say, the punishment of Lieutenant Lomax for an insult offered upon this deck."

"Leon St. Vale," and as the name passed her lips Eve took an involuntary step forward.

"What! St. Vale! you in a common seaman's garb, and so far forgetting yourself as to strike the officer of the deck."

"By Heaven, sir, but in your going, your coming, and your actions there is some strange mystery that should not hang over a king's officer, sir."

"A mystery, sir, I can clear up, if you will hear me."

"When you have replaced that garb for your uniform, I will give you an interview in my cabin, sir."

The face of Leon St. Vale flushed, but he bowed and went below to change his attire, strangely impressed with the reception he had received.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE THREAT.

WHEN Sir Roslyn Stannix, the Vulture's commander, entered the cabin his brow was

stern, and it was evident that he felt in no friendly mood toward his returned lieutenant.

Leon St. Vale was quietly looking at a half-finished sketch in colors of a calm at sea, painted by Lady Eve, but put it aside and bowed to his captain.

He had arrayed himself in full uniform, but his face had not fully recovered from its haggard look, caused by his stay on board the brigantine, and fierce struggle with the tempest in his daring escape, and around his lacerated hand he had wrapped a silk kerchief.

"Be seated, sir, and I would hear from you an explanation of your very strange conduct," said Sir Roslyn, with unbending mien.

"Pardon me, Sir Roslyn," and there was a flush of anger upon St. Vale's face, "but may I ask in what respect you consider my conduct strange?"

Sir Roslyn looked his surprise at the question, and answered with sarcasm:

"I should think it strange for an officer, sent on duty, to deliberately remain on a pirate vessel, and return a letter to his commander to the effect that he expected to become a pirate."

St. Vale sprung to his feet in bitter anger, but almost instantly burst out into a laugh, while he said:

"Sir Roslyn, as you know, that vessel was believed to be a merchantman, but upon boarding her I saw that her armament was cleverly concealed, and I knew that it was the Black Pirate."

"Had I betrayed surprise, or fear, the death of myself and the men in the boat would have instantly followed so I acted with strategy, pretended to know just what the vessel was, and intimidated, as I had killed an officer, referring to poor Lord Caverly, sir, it was necessary for me to seek safety in flight."

"This deceived the pirate officer, and I begged to write a note back to you, sending it by the boat."

"I wrote two, one for your eyes, which I thought you would understand, yet I dared not write more explicitly, in case the coxswain might be made to hand it over after I had given it to him."

"The other I wrote for the pirate's eyes, and I dropped it overboard and handed the coxswain the other; and in this way saved the crew in the boat, and made known to you just what the vessel was, while I took fearful chances for myself."

Then St. Vale went on to tell of his ghastly experience on the brigantine, all that he had learned from the Black Pirate as to his intended cruise, and of the chase of the craft by the Petrel, the storm, and his escape, and adding:

"It was my intention, sir, to remain with him until I got command of the schooner he promised to give me; but I concluded not to do so, and after my perils and chances with death, I return to my ship to find myself insulted by Lieutenant Kent Lomax, and hurt by your manner and suspicions."

"Forgive me, St. Vale, for I will admit I wronged you, and was strangely obtuse regarding your note sent me; but since your departure Lomax has continually thrown out insinuations, and some seeds of doubt regarding you which I did not notice then, but do now, and he shall publicly ask your pardon for the insult offered."

"That is immaterial, sir, as I punished him for it, and it remains with Lieutenant Lomax whether the matter shall go further."

"One can recall words, sir, and obtain forgiveness for them, but a blow can never be recalled or forgiven from my standpoint, Sir Roslyn."

"Egad, but you are right, St. Vale; but I will see Lomax and urge that he drop the matter; but you certainly have had a strong champion in Lady Eve, and Lomax is sore over the biting rebuke she gave him after some of his remarks about you."

"That Caverly duel hurt you with the admiralty, St. Vale, I am free to admit, for they wish to put down dueling in the service, having, they think, enough fighting outside for their officers of the army and navy, and I do not care to have you mixed up with another affair, for nothing less than the capture of the Black Pirate would get you pardoned for it by the king."

"I have nothing to do in the matter, Sir Roslyn, but if Lieutenant Lomax presses it, I cannot retreat."

"As far as duty on board the vessel is concerned, I will always treat him with marked

politeness, for I suppose you intend I shall resume my duties?"

"Instantly; come on deck with me, for it is now eight bells and you relieve Lomax, for I intended to do so."

St. Vale arose and accompanied Sir Roslyn Stannix on deck, and even the well-disciplined seamen looked up with surprise, as they had all been led to believe that the young lieutenant had turned pirate in earnest.

Lady Eve's face flushed with joy, Sir Grey frowned, for he had no love for the young lieutenant for the very reason that his daughter had, and Kent Lomax raised his hands in amazement, while he half turned his head to hide the bruise on his cheek received by contact with St. Vale's fist.

"Lieutenant Lomax, Lieutenant St. Vale, as before his departure, is the first officer of this vessel, and relieves you from duty now," said Sir Roslyn sternly, and in a loud tone that went the length of the ship.

"But, Sir Roslyn, are you fully satisfied that—"

"Lieutenant Lomax," angrily broke in the captain, "permit me to say that I am satisfied, and if you are not I am confident that Lieutenant St. Vale will fully satisfy you too."

Kent Lomax turned pale at this, but relieved of duty on deck scowled and went below, bitterness in his breast, for he was one of these jealous, cross-grained natures that envy others, and having once seen Lady Eve, and remembering that it was said at the club that she cared more for St. Vale than for Caverly, he had determined to destroy her regard for the former by base insinuations against him, for in his heart he believed that the mystery of his remaining on board the Black Pirate's vessel could be explained away.

Once in his state-room, and the door closed, he turned and shook his fist toward the deck, while he muttered:

"I'll not forget you, St. Vale, and I swear you shall yet rue that blow, for I shall crush you in her eyes and the eyes of your friends, so help me Heaven."

CHAPTER XX.

A FATEFUL COMMUNICATION.

THE mission upon which Sir Grey Alstone had been sent by his king to Canada was one of considerable importance in the baronet's eyes, though of really little importance in reality.

Trusted with the management of his daughter's fortune, and the missions salary not paying him very generously, he was determined to "astonish the natives" in Canada by his great dignity as a king's commissioner, and dazzle them with the splendor in which he lived.

A large and handsome mansion not far from the Governor's was selected only a short time after he landed from the Vulture, and thither he went with his daughter to carry on an establishment which had swamped its owner, financially, in a few months after he had built it.

As for Lady Eve, she knew not what her father received for his services, and supposed that he was allowed certain expenditures, and asked no questions in regard to her own wealth so long as he paid her monthly her income, and was very glad to return what she could not use to him to invest for her as he thought best.

The Vulture needing repairs after her short fight with the brigantine and long battling with the hurricanes, was taken into the docks, and her officers consequently had much leisure upon their hands, and St. Vale often found his way to Sir Grey's residence, greatly to that gentleman's regret and Eve's delight.

Some ten days after the arrival of the Vulture in port a merchant vessel came in with a strange, weird story to tell of having passed a vessel in a storm at night, driving aimlessly with the winds, and with her rigging hung with human forms.

Of course there were unbelievers of this story, and hearing it, Leon St. Vale sought the merchant captain and questioned him upon the subject.

The man was no coward or story-spreader, St. Vale saw at a glance, though possessing in a degree the superstition of his craft; but he told his story plainly, and his words carried conviction that he had seen just what he said he had.

"This is a most remarkable affair, St. Vale, and we will hasten repairs and put to sea,"

said Sir Roslyn Stannix, when he had heard what his lieutenant reported.

"I got the locality, sir, of the strange craft, and we might still find her in that neighborhood."

"But can you account for the mystery, St. Vale?"

"Only in one way, Sir Roslyn?"

"And that way?"

"The Black Pirate!"

"Hail it does look like his work; but what vessel can it be?"

"The Petrel is overdue, sir."

"Good God! can you mean—"

"You know they were within a league of each other when I left the brigantine, as I told you, sir."

"True; but Cuthbert is an old sea-dog, brave as a lion, and has a larger craft, heavier guns, and more of them to a broadside, and a larger crew than this sea-devil."

"True, sir, but you know that the Black Pirate is considered invincible."

"Bah! I would attack him wherever I met him."

"True, Sir Roslyn; but—"

"But what, St. Vale?"

"You know something of the deadly marksmanship of his gunners, the speed of his vessel, and that his crew are trained by daily combats with foes, and from what I know of the Black Pirate, I shudder when I think that this vessel may be the Petrel."

"What does the merchant captain report her as being?"

"A trim, small brig, pierced for guns, and with masts raking far aft."

"That certainly looks ominous; but I will hasten work and run out after this Black Pirate, and give him a chance to string us up, too."

And so urgently did Sir Roslyn push repairs that the Vulture set sail two weeks after coming into the harbor, and many a farewell was waved to her as she sped away, for all knew that her mission was to look up the weird ship and hunt down the Black Pirate.

Two days had the Vulture been at sea, and then it came on to blow with violence, for it was the season of storms.

Night came on, and the gale increased to such an extent that Leon St. Vale, who had charge of the deck, laid the brig to ride it out.

Suddenly a wild, startled cry came from the look-out, and driving before the wind, plunging, bending, and fearful to look at even in the dim light, came a vessel.

Instantly St. Vale turned his face upon her and cried:

"Great God! it is the gallows-ship!"

Quickly on deck came Sir Roslyn, the officers not on duty, and the crew that had turned in, and all beheld drive by like a hideous phantom, the weird craft!

"Ho, the brig, ahoy!" shouted St. Vale in trumpet tones.

But no answer came from the ghastly-looking craft, with its dark forms waving in the air, chains rattling, and swooping, plunging motion, and on it swept out of bearing.

"Shall we give chase, sir?" asked St. Vale of Captain Stannix.

"No, for we would endanger our craft in this wild sea."

"Take her course, and when the wind and sea lull, we will pursue," answered the commander.

"Did you recognize the vessel, sir?"

"It looked strangely like the Petrel," sadly answered Sir Roslyn.

"It did indeed, sir, but with the driving spray, and watching those ghastly swinging forms, I did not note her hull and rig as I should," replied Leon St. Vale, and left alone once more he paced the deck until dawn, and then put the brig away upon the course of the strange craft, for the gale had lost its fury.

But search as they might, no trace of the strange vessel could be found, and, giving up the hunt, Sir Roslyn, at the suggestion of Leon St. Vale, headed for Newbank, in the hope of heading off the Black Pirate on his cruise down the coast, as he had said he intended hovering off each of the large seaports for a few days, on his way to the Gulf, to lie in wait for richly-laden ships.

Several vessels were met and spoken, and all had stories to tell of the deeds of the Black Pirate, whom they said had gone South, and two reported having seen the weird craft with the ghastly forms in the rigging, and one, in

attempting to send a boat aboard had it cap-sized and the five men in it were drowned, and they made no second effort, but sailed away, believing all doomed that came in contact with such a weird vessel.

As his orders were to act with the Petrel, Sir Roslyn determined to return once more to Halifax and see if she had come into port, or there was any news regarding her, and if not, to start alone on the track of the Black Pirate, convinced that the "gallows-ship," as the weird wanderer of the deep was called, must indeed be the brig-of-war.

Leaving Kent Lomax in charge, and who had been strangely friendly toward St. Vale, the latter and Captain Sir Roslyn Stannix went on shore, and were met by Sir Grey Alstone in a carriage and driven to his elegant home, where the Governor of the province awaited them.

Having heard the report of Sir Roslyn of his cruise, and the sighting of the gallows-ship, Sir Grey Alstone said:

"Now, gentlemen, this solves the mystery, for I found it pinned on my front door the fifth day after you sailed."

He opened a large, official-looking document as he spoke, and all saw on it at the head a pair of daggers crossed, one red, the other black, and then Leon St. Vale read aloud:

"To His Majesty's Commissioner in the Canadas:
"GREETING—Whereas the King of England armed, equipped and manned two fleet brigs-of-war to come to the American shore to drive piracy from the high seas, and to especially hunt down the Black Pirate, and capturing his vessel, to hang the chief and his crew in the rigging of his own craft, be it known that one of those said brigs, the Petrel, has met the outlaw brigantine, and, catching a Tartar, had the orders of His Majesty carried out on her officers and crew, and a like fate shall also befall the Vulture at the hands of
THE BLACK PIRATE,
"Of the brigantine Sea Scourge."

This terrible communication fell like a bomb-shell upon the party, and for a minute no one spoke.

Then Sir Roslyn Stannix sprang to his feet and said hoarsely:

"This night shall I sail in pursuit of that sea-monster, and the Petrel outrage shall be avenged, or repeated on the Vulture."

CHAPTER XXI.

A FUGITIVE SAVED, A PRISONER LOST.

UPON a pleasant afternoon, a month after the sailing of the Vulture in pursuit of the brigantine of the Black Pirate, a vessel was cruising slowly along the eastern shores of the Carribee Islands, and her officers and crew were intensely looking landward.

A closer look at the vessel and it was seen to be the Vulture brig-of-war, which had run down the coast of the United States, and learning from vessels spoken that a brigantine, supposed to be the Black Pirate, had been seen heading for the Carribees, had at once followed in that direction.

Suddenly Leon St. Vale raised his glass, and after but a glance through it, cried:

"There is a boat putting out from the shore, sir, and it has but a single occupant who is rowing."

Sir Roslyn glanced in the direction indicated and said:

"You are right, St. Vale; but I did not believe that island inhabited."

"See, sir, he is pursued by a long proa filled with men."

The second boat was now visible, and evidently in full pursuit of the light skiff ahead, for the sail of the proa was set, and a dozen paddles were working industriously.

Instantly Sir Roslyn called out:

"The breeze is too light for us, St. Vale, to run in, so lower away a boat and go to that fugitive's aid, for fugitive he must be, and forward there! throw a shot after that large boat, if you can reach it."

St. Vale at once sprang to obey the order given him, and in remarkably quick time—in fact, just as the bow gun sent forth its shot—the third cutter, with a dozen men, put off from the brig's side.

With only a three-knot breeze blowing, the cutter rapidly dropped the Vulture astern, urged by its eager oarsmen, and then it became a hot race between it and the proa, as to which should reach the skiff first.

The one in the skiff was pulling with might and main, and the proa was steadily gaining upon him nevertheless, and was only a quarter of a mile astern, while the cutter was yet a mile and a half distant from the fugitive.

The ball from the brig fell short, and seeing

this, Sir Roslyn ordered the fore-castle long thirty-two to open, and although its shot swept dangerously near the heads of the rowers in the proa, they still held on in pursuit.

"Row for life, men, for that fellow has some good cause to fly," cried St. Vale, and seeing that the men were forging the cutter still faster, he added: "A month's pay to every man at the oars if we save him."

The seamen smiled, but would not waste breath in a cheer, and their blades bent double as they forced them through the water, and the cutter seemed to fly.

Watching the fugitive eagerly through his glass, Leon St. Vale saw that he was straining every muscle, and rowed with a strong, plucky stroke, that showed his nerve had not left him in spite of his danger.

But with the wind astern, a sail in the proa, and a dozen paddles to his pair of oars, the fugitive was in great danger, as his pursuers gained steadily upon him, and seemed wholly to disregard the shots from the brig, which, with the wind ahead, could not approach nearer except on tacks, and it was too light a breeze to serve her much.

Suddenly the fugitive glanced around, and momentarily leaving his rowing, coolly took in the position of the Vulture and the cutter, and then calculated the distance of the proa from him.

As if hopeful, he again bent to his oars with renewed will, and once more his light skiff seemed to fairly fly over the waters.

As the fugitive was now in a range with the proa, the brig was compelled to cease firing, and in silence the three boats' crews bent to their work, and matters looked dismal for the plucky man in the skiff, and St. Vale again turned his glass upon him.

At that moment the rower once more turned his head, and then broke a cry from Leon St. Vale's lips:

"Great God! it is Lord Cecil Milnor! For your very lives, men, pull and save that man!"

Though the cutter was dashing along at terrific speed, at the earnest pleading of the lieutenant, it seemed to jump half out of the water as the oarsmen bent to their work.

The sweat covered their faces, the veins on their foreheads stood out like cords, and they breathed hard in the fierce struggle; but no man would yield to fatigue, and on the cutter flew.

"Yes, it is Lieutenant Milnor of the ill-fated Petrel, for I recognize him now, as he again turns, and he is in uniform."

"And those devils in chase are determined to retake him, but by Heaven! I'll follow them into their stronghold if they do," and the men knew their lieutenant would keep his word.

Nearer and nearer the skiff came to the cutter, and nearer and nearer the proa crept up on the skiff, until St. Vale remarked:

"We'll save him, lads, but we will have to fight for it."

A cheer broke from the crew at this, and with seemingly renewed strength they continued their killing pace.

"Ho! Lord Cecil, ahoy! pull for your life," cried St. Vale, as they came in hailing distance of the skiff.

Turning his head, yet still making his oars bend, Lord Cecil called back:

"Ay, ay, Vultures, but be ready to meet those devils, for they are the Black Pirate's minions."

"Holy Neptune! but we've run him to his den! Bravo, lads, for a rich reward awaits you," and springing up into the stern sheets, St. Vale seized a red flag and whirled it thrice around his head, the signal agreed upon, should he need more aid from the brig.

"Bravo, boys, they are lowering boats to our aid."

"Now one strong pull, and Lord Cecil is safe."

The next instant the skiff dashed up, turned suddenly to face its pursuers, and Lord Cecil cried:

"Pitch me a cutlass and pistol, my good friend, St. Vale, and we'll meet these devils."

The weapons were thrown to him, the crew gave a cheer at having saved him, and the next instant Leon St. Vale skillfully guided the cutter in between the proa, which was heading for the skiff, and the two came together with a crash that stove in the side of the lighter boat.

"Spring on the proa, lads, and take her, for one boat goes down," cried St. Vale, and

he sprang, cutlass in hand into the midst of the pirates.

But the shock caused the two boats to rebound, and before any of his men could follow him, a wave separated them, and a dozen hands grasped the daring lieutenant, while a stern voice cried:

"Back to the island, men, for this game will do for us."

With the cutter filling with water no attempt at rescue could be made, and Lord Cecil was compelled to aid the crew, and away sped the proa, with their prisoner, and its fierce crew jeering at their foes.

CHAPTER XXII.

LORD CECIL MILNOR TELLS HIS STORY.

It was Lieutenant Lomax that came on with the gig and second cutter to the aid of the drowning crew, for it was with the greatest difficulty Lord Cecil managed to get the men of Leon St. Vale's boat rescued from a watery grave.

The two officers had met before, but yet were not on friendly terms, though speaking acquaintances, and Lieutenant Lomax seemed to show little anxiety to hasten, or after arriving, regarding the fate of St. Vale, when told of all that had occurred.

"It is strange that the pirates should capture, and not kill him, and also that he should be the only one taken; but St. Vale has a penchant, it seems, for being with buccaneers," sneered Lomax.

"Am I to understand this as a slur upon my friend St. Vale, sir?" asked Lord Cecil, quickly turning to Lieutenant Lomax, who knew the young noble was no man to trifle with, and ever ready to make remarks that he dared not uphold, he returned with a laugh, as though to treat the matter lightly:

"My lord, it has only been a few weeks since Lieutenant St. Vale escaped from the Black Pirate, and hence my remark."

"Indeed! then he has been before most unfortunate, and is now in as ill luck as myself, and on my account, which I regret exceedingly, and if Captain Sir Roslyn Stannix will only send an expedition into the island to his rescue, I will gladly guide it."

"By going on board, Lord Cecil, you can see Sir Roslyn."

"I shall do so, thank you, Lieutenant Lomax," and seated in his skiff he rowed toward the brig, followed by the other boats.

Going over the side he was welcomed by Sir Roslyn, who knew him well, and said heartily:

"I am glad indeed to see you, my lord; but regret that Lieutenant St. Vale is among the missing, for I saw what happened with my glass, and was surprised, Lomax, that you did not pursue."

"I returned for orders, sir," was the rather surly reply.

"Well, sir, return to your boats and instantly proceed to—Nay, hold! I will lead the expedition myself."

"And permit me, Sir Roslyn, to act as your pilot, and at the same time to suggest that you take not less than sixty men, as there are two score on the island, as I know."

"I will follow your advice, my lord," and in five minutes more Sir Roslyn and Lord Cecil entered the barge, while a cutter and the gig followed in its wake under the command of a junior lieutenant and midshipman.

As he took the tiller of the barge, at his own suggestion, the channel being a circuitous one, Lord Cecil replied in answer to a question from Sir Roslyn, as to how he came to be a captive:

"To begin my story, Sir Roslyn, I shall have to say that the Petrel, after transferring her passengers to your kind care, pursued the brigantine for days, yet with little hope of overhauling the pirate, as he seemed to play with us."

"One night in a severe blow our decks were swept by a huge wave and I was carried overboard with several of the crew, while at the same time the life-boat was dragged from its davits."

"I was unhurt, and seeing the life-boat flying by grasped its gunwale, and managed to draw myself into it, and there I clung, hoping that the brig would be able to find me."

"But morning dawned and no vessel was in sight, and the sea going down, I bailed out my boat and made myself as comfortable as I could under the circumstances."

"Toward evening I sighted a sail, and with my coat and one of the oars, which were lashed

in the boat, I caught the look-out's eye, and was taken on board.

"It was an English vessel out of Portsmouth, bound to Boston, and having on board a rich cargo of merchandise and a few passengers.

"From her captain and all on board I received the utmost kindness, and was hoping soon to reach Boston, from whence I could go to Halifax and rejoin my vessel, when we sighted a sail, which I at once pronounced to be the Black Pirate's brigantine, for I had learned to know her well.

"We did all we could to escape, but it was useless, for the pirate sailed like a witch, opened on us with his guns, and in spite of all we had to surrender.

"Most of our crew were mercilessly cut down, and then, as the huge black demon, for I can call him nothing else, seemed to be in a hurry to go on a cruise after other devilry, he threw a prize crew on board of us and ordered his officer to take us to the rendezvous, which proved to be yonder island.

"On the way the fever broke out on board, and the vessels' captain and first officer died in irons below decks, and the cruel pirate lieutenant, who would not release them even to clasp their hands in prayer, was next taken down and expired.

"Then the outlaw crew came to me, as the only man on board competent to command the vessel, and told me if I pledged my word to take the ship to the island, they would give a pledge to release me upon arrival there.

"I declined unless they would release all of the passengers and the few of the ship's crew too.

"They refused, and threatened to run me up to the yard-arm if I did not take command; but I remained firm and got their pledge to release us all, and I took charge and we reached the island in safety, though a number more on board died of fever before our arrival.

"Seeing that they broke faith with us, for I was not even released, I watched my chance to escape, and sighting the Vulture, and recognizing her, I made a bold run for the harbor, got into a skiff I had already had my eye on, and you know the rest.

"Now, I fear, those devils may not only put those passengers and the ship's crew to death, but also St. Vale; but I will pilot you to the landing, and then we must fight it out, for they are a desperate lot."

"If the brig could only run in," said Sir Roslyn.

"There is a channel the brigantine enters by, in her visits to the island, but I do not know it, and this way there is not over four feet of water in places. No, Sir Roslyn, we must depend upon our strong right arms, and the good cause, and ask no mercy for we shall receive none, for those devils have told me how they served the Petrel, and their reckoning for that red crime shall come."

"Ay, shall it," sternly said Sir Roslyn.

"Ay ay, sir," said the men in the barge, as in one voice.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ISLAND MYSTERY.

WITH a skill that was surprising, when he had been but twice before through the channel, Lord Cecil piloted the boats into the inlet that formed the harborage of the island.

It was deep, and with high hills surrounding it, a safe haven for a vessel even larger than the Vulture, did it once succeed in entering the basin through the secret and dangerous channel leading to it.

To the surprise of all in the boats, they were not met at the beach with a fusilade from the pirates, and, in fact, not a human being was in sight.

There was the long proa, with its out-rigger resting on the sands, a few canoes and yawls, and a small sail-boat of several tons, and upon the hillside above was a row of shanties, built of logs and pieces of ship timber, but not a living being in view.

"They are ambushed for us somewhere, and we must find them; but it would be best to divide in half a dozen separate bands," suggested Lord Cecil.

"You are right, my lord, and you command one of the parties, and we'll make the huts yonder our rendezvous," answered Sir Roslyn, and the crew were divided into six bands of ten men each, and separated for a search of the island.

Lord Cecil went with his men at once toward the shanties, where he knew the pirates

had their quarters when on shore, and where the prisoners were kept.

He expected that they were concealed there, and anticipated a volley as he approached the huts, and the other parties seeing him approach halted in dread of his instant death.

But he walked fearlessly up to the central of the five cabins, and called to the men, who had hung back, to follow him.

Dashing open the door he sprung within, cutlass in hand.

But the cabin was deserted. With surprise he visited the others, and not an occupant did one of them contain.

"They have retreated into the island, lads, and we will wait until we hear a shot, and then rush to the aid of our friends," he said, cheerily.

"Is the island very large, sir?" asked a coxswain.

"Oh, no, my man; one can walk around it in a couple of hours," was the answer, and Lord Cecil went from cabin to cabin, so lately occupied by the pirates and their prisoners, and mentally commented upon the mysterious disappearance of all.

One by one the bands came in and reported a careful search, and yet no clew had been discovered of the missing pirates.

The last party to return was that under Sir Roslyn himself, and he had the same report to make.

"There must be some secret cavern on the island, my lord," he said.

"I know of none, Sir Roslyn, nor have I heard such a retreat even hinted at by the pirates."

"Then where are they?"

"That's what we cannot find out, sir; but let us, in a body, go around the island on another search."

This suggestion of Lord Cecil was acted upon, and slowly the whole party began the search together.

But after two hours they again found themselves near the cabins, and without the slightest clew to the missing pirates.

Determined not to go back without accomplishing some good, Sir Roslyn ordered the shanties burned, and soon they were smoldering ruins.

"Now, lads, gather up those boats and we'll tow them off to the brig for kindling wood for the cook," ordered Captain Stannix.

"One moment, Sir Roslyn; I would suggest that yourself and half of your men return to the brig, leaving about thirty men, under my command, in hiding here.

"Then, believing all are gone, the pirates will come out of their den, wherever it is, and we can pounce upon them, and at the firing you can come quickly to our aid."

"A good idea, my lord, and one I will act upon; yet I hate to leave so small a force with you."

"They will be sufficient to keep the devils at bay until you come to our aid, and if fewer went off to the brig there might be some spy watching, and he would report accordingly."

"That is true, so you shall have your own way, so suppose you quietly withdraw with your men now, my lord."

"No, Sir Roslyn, I shall hide under the shelter of the rocks here on the beach."

Thus it was arranged, and, having assembled his men, Lord Cecil concealed them in the crevices of the rocks along the shore of the basin, while the booty obtained from the cabins before they were burned, was rigged out to look like men to an ordinary observer, and the boats departed for the brig and arrived alongside just at sunset.

When darkness began to steal over the island Lord Cecil, whose stay there of several weeks had given him a good knowledge of the locality, bade the midshipman, who had remained with him as next in command, to keep the men quiet while he went forth to reconnoiter.

He went cautiously away in the darkness, dodging from rock to bush, and at last reached the smoldering ruins of the shanties.

Here, behind some scrub trees, he sat for a long time waiting and watching.

Presently, as he was about to return to the beach, he heard a footstep.

Instantly he crouched back in the shadow and waited.

The tread fell distinctly on his ears now, firm and quick, like a quarter-deck step.

Nearer and nearer it came, until presently a tall form came in sight, and advanced directly toward him.

As the stranger was passing the last pile of embers, and within a few feet of Lord Cecil, a log broke in two, burned through, and sent up a shower of sparks that gave a bright light!

"Leon St. Vale, thank God!"

The words broke from the lips of Lord Cecil Milnor, and he sprung to his feet as he spoke.

But at their utterance Leon St. Vale started back, dropped his hand upon a revolver, and called out sternly:

"Who calls me?"

"It is I, St. Vale, your old friend Cecil."

"Ha! Lord Cecil; and where are your men?"

"Back at the beach. Come, quickly, ere we are discovered."

"No, I cannot come," and Leon St. Vale looked annoyed and ill at ease.

"Cannot come? Why, what do you mean, Leon?"

"You return to your men and leave the island, as I thought you had done."

"Are you mad, St. Vale?"

"No, I am perfectly sane, Lord Milnor, and repeat I cannot return with you," was the resolute response.

"You have some motive for this?"

"Yes."

"Will you not tell it me?"

"No."

"But, St. Vale, you—"

"Lord Cecil, I ask you to do me a favor, and I feel that you will do so."

"Upon my honor yes, St. Vale, but—"

"It is that you return to your men, say not one word of having met me, or seen any one, and leave this island as soon as you can."

"A remarkably strange request, sir," said Lord Cecil coldly.

"One you said you would grant upon your honor, and I beg you to go."

"Now I cannot say more, but only leave the island, and I will tell you that it is useless for you to look for the pirates as you cannot find them."

"If you do not see me within three months, Lord Cecil, say what you please about meeting me to-night, and set me down in your own mind as whatever I may be considered."

"Good-night, Lord Cecil," and without another word Leon St. Vale turned and strode back in the direction from whence he came.

"Well, am I mad, or has he gone crazy?"

"Am I dreaming, or has he turned pirate?"

So saying Lord Cecil Milner walked slowly back to the beach; but he did not speak of his adventure, for mysterious as was Leon St. Vale's request, he had promised, and he would not break his pledge made to him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GOLDEN FETTERS.

THE moment that Leon St. Vale sprung into the proa full of pirates, he saw several faces, in one sweeping glance that he took, that he had seen on the brigantine, and realizing that his own boat was shattered, and that he was wholly at their mercy, he dropped his cutlass, which had been raised with deadly intent, and cried in a low tone:

"Seize me, men!"

Several who had recognized him, and were startled at beholding one whom they had believed to be dead, at once did as ordered, and checked the blows of their comrades aimed at his heart.

"Pull back with vigor, lads, or you'll have the whole crew of the brig upon you," was St. Vale's next order, in a low tone; but given with no show of hesitancy or appearance that it would be other than obeyed.

Involuntarily the crew obeyed, and the proa moved away at a rapid pace, when the man at the tiller, a burly fellow with a brutal, savage face, cried:

"Hold! why do you row back, until we have killed those devils and retaken that daring officer?"

"By my orders, Senor Quentin, if you are that personage," calmly said Leon St. Vale, turning his piercing eyes upon the proa's commander.

"Your orders? And who the devil are you, senor?"

"I am the lieutenant of Captain Ebony, the Black Pirate, and have just escaped from the brig and rejoined my comrades," was the cool reply of the young officer, who now rose and walked aft, while the proa was dashing swiftly along on her way back to the island basin.

"Senor, that is a strange story to tell here," and the island commandant spoke with more respect in his tone than he had before used, yet with evident doubt.

"As you do not know me, senor, I will explain, as under the circumstances it is your right to have an explanation.

"I was a lieutenant on yonder vessel, killed a brother officer of his Majesty's service, and ended to the Black Pirate's vessel by a ruse, and in a storm was washed from the deck of the brigantine, picked up by a small trader, and, strange to say, taken back to the Vulture, where I was not yet regarded as an outcast, no dispatches having arrived from England.

"Resuming my rank, I came on this cruise with her, and seeing your pursuit of a fugitive, took command of the boat that tried to thwart you.

"There are men here that know me, having been on the Black Pirate's vessel with me, and I have no other explanation to make, and will only say that, as your superior, Senor Quentin, I assume command."

There was no worse desperado in the Black Pirates' entire band than Jacques Quentin, but he was completely awed by the cool effrontery of St. Vale, and without a word moved aside for him to take a seat aft, while he motioned toward the tiller, as though to relinquish it to him.

"No, senor, thank you, for you know the channel, and I do not.

"I have no desire to relieve you from your duties as commandant here."

Then, turning to one of the Black Pirate's crew, whom he remembered, he continued:

"Sancho, where did you leave the chief?"

"Off Nantucket, senor, after our capture of an English trader.

"I was one of the prize crew put on board, and you may notice several more of us here, senor," answered the man, without leaving his hard work with the paddle.

St. Vale glanced over the faces before him, and nodded pleasantly as he recalled those from the brigantine, after which he said, addressing the buccaneer commander of the island rendezvous:

"Senor Quentin, what are you going to do to keep off the attack of the brig, for Captain Stannix will certainly land a force against the island?"

"Fight them," was the abrupt reply.

"You have some thirty men here?"

"No, senor, I have forty."

"Not enough, for the brig can send a hundred against you."

"So many, senor?" asked Quentin in surprise.

"Yes, for her crew was enlarged and formed of picked men for this very work."

"Then we'll have to retreat, senor."

"Leave the island?"

"Oh, no, senor, but hide."

"They will ferret you out."

"Not where we hide, senor, as you will see; but here we are, and you are welcome to our rude home," and Quentin sprang ashore, followed by the crew, and all went up toward the shanties, already spoken of in the foregoing chapters.

Having by his cool strategy saved his life, and at the same time gained an influence over the island pirates, St. Vale kept up the part he was playing by inquiring into the booty held there, and the number of captives.

But all the while the evil nature of Jacques Quentin was growing bitter, for he liked no interference from other than the Black Pirate, and proud of his power, and knowing it would be some time before his chief's arrival, he felt that he was to become a star of lesser magnitude in the eyes of the men and the captives.

His own men, the regular guards of the island, he knew he could depend upon, and those from the brigantine were but half a dozen in number, and he began to lay plans to show St. Vale that he was master there.

In the shanty devoted to the prisoners, St. Vale found some dozen in number, mostly rude men, but among them five persons who had been passengers upon the ill-fated vessel that had fallen into the clutches of the Black Pirate.

Among these five were three gentlemen, a lady and her daughter, the latter a beautiful maiden of eighteen, the former a woman whose life was slowly ebbing away, for she lay upon a seaman's cot, with the stamp of death already creeping over her sad, wan face.

"These I'll remove to our hiding-place, and the lads can carry the valuable booty," said

Quentin in a commanding tone, as he entered the shanty where the captives were, and rudely laid his hand upon the cot of the invalid.

"How far is it to the place, senor?" asked St. Vale.

"Half a mile, and the sick one will have a rough road of it; but I believe it's more put on than real ailment," brutally said the ruffian.

"How dare you speak so, sir, of my poor, dying mother, when your treatment of us has done much to make her so ill?" said the maiden almost fiercely.

"Aha, my pretty leopard, changing your spots again, for one moment you speak out with sweetness, the next with fury," sneered the man.

"Your duty, Senor Quentin, is not to insult the Black Pirate's captives, but to care for them until he decides what is to be done with them," calmly said St. Vale.

The captives had before gazed upon the young officer with surprise, first believing him also a fellow unfortunate with themselves, but changing their minds when they saw that the pirates obeyed him.

Now they bent toward him with hope, for be he what he might, it was the first kind word in their behalf that they had heard from their captors.

As for Jacques Quentin he fairly glared an instant upon St. Vale and then hissed forth:

"Did you come here to teach Jacques Quentin his duty?"

"I did, if you do not know it," was the unruffled reply.

"Then, by the Virgin, senor, you have mistaken your man, as you shall see;" and turning to his men, congregated at the door, he cried:

"Here, lads, throw this old dying hag over the cliff, and then carry the captives and the booty here to the secret cave, and then I'll see what this young officer has to say as to who commands on this island."

"No, no, you will not be so cruel," and the maiden threw herself forward to shield her mother from the rude touch of the men who advanced to obey the command of their leader.

But suddenly St. Vale leaped before them, while he said in ringing tones:

"Devils! you dare attempt to obey the cruel order of that hound, and I'll lay you dead at my feet!"

It would be hard to tell which seemed the most astonished, the island commander or his men, at this sudden stand taken by St. Vale; but the latter fell quickly back, while the former shouted, as he sprang forward:

"I'll deal with him, lads."

St. Vale at first seemed as though he would shoot the man in his tracks; but glancing at the wildly frightened face of the invalid, he thrust his pistol into his breast, and with one sweep of his cutlass struck the blade of Jacques Quentin from his grasp.

At the same instant he withdrew his hand from the inner pocket of his coat, and instead of the pistol it had held, there was now in it a pair of shining manacles.

Seizing Quentin in his powerful arms, he bent him backward with a remarkable exhibition of strength, and almost instantly followed the snap of the springs as the fetters were clasped upon his wrists.

"Holy Virgin, you have doomed me to death!"

The shriek burst in frenzied accents from the lips of the pirate officer.

"The Golden Fetters!"

"The Fetters of Doom!"

The cries broke from the lips of the pirate crew, and they fell back with a certain awe before St. Vale as he turned toward them, wholly at a loss to understand the strange remarks and strange mien of respectful awe of those who seemed about to turn upon him a moment since.

What could it mean?

Accidentally, in thrusting the pistol into his breast pocket, he had felt and clutched the golden fetters taken from the skeleton wrists of his father in the secret cell of Rock Ruin.

Now the sight of them upon his wrists caused Jacques Quentin to stand with bowed head, trembling and downcast, and his followers to shrink away as in dire alarm.

There was a strange mystery in this which St. Vale could not solve; but he was determined to turn it to advantage now, and said, sternly:

"Do you obey me now, hounds?"

"Ay, ay, senor," and the hand of every

pirate present went up in salute, even Quentin raising his manacled wrists.

"Then carry your booty and those prisoners to the secret retreat, but leave this maiden with her mother."

The maiden bent above the face of her mother in deep, silent grief, but at the words of St. Vale raised her head and said, softly:

"My mother is dead, sir."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SECRET RETREAT.

THOUGH St. Vale saw that there was some mystery in the Golden Fetters, that gave him great power over the pirates, even to the island commandant, he did not care to go too far, by leaving the captives at the shanties, for the crew of the brig to rescue, as it might give the pirates an idea that he was not wholly loyal to them.

So he told them to lead them away, and turning to the sorrowing maiden, said kindly:

"I will bear the body of your mother with us now, and in time give it decent burial, and do all in my power for you and your fellow unfortunates."

The beautiful girl, for she was strangely lovely in face and form, turned her eyes in silent thanks upon St. Vale, and then folded the blanket closely around her mother's form.

Silently St. Vale raised the attenuated body in his arms and left the hut, following the line of buccaneers, who, with their booty and captives had preceded him.

The maiden followed behind him, and entering the thicket, growing at the end of the glen in which the camp was situated, the young officer kept close to the pirates ahead until all halted at a wall of rock, which towered up some thirty feet above them, and was in the shape of a cave, forming a strange freak of nature.

Upon the summit of this rock, grew a solitary pine tree, twisted by the fierce winds into fantastic shapes, yet clinging firmly into the crevices, where its roots had grown.

As the pirates reached this chimney-like rock, with the tree sticking out like a bush from the top, they formed a group of four men facing each other, and each holding firmly to the shoulders of the other.

Then, upon the shoulders of these four more mounted, and so on, until a column of twenty men was formed, leaning against the face of the rock.

Entering this hollow shell of humanity, an active man nimbly climbed up to the top, and catching the branches of the tree, drew himself upon the summit of the rock, while the column at once began to diminish, by those on top jumping off.

"A ladder would serve the purpose with less trouble," said St. Vale, who had carefully watched the strange proceeding.

"And give a foe who landed a hint, senor, to see what use it may be put to," responded one of the pirates.

The man on the summit now, to the surprise of St. Vale and the captives disappeared from sight, for they had believed the top of the rock flat and solid; but a moment after he reappeared and threw over a rope ladder, the upper end being attached to two beams that projected beyond the face of the wall.

Another rope, with a net attached was also lowered, and into this some of the pirates placed the booty, while others nimbly went up the ladder to the top of the rock.

"How will the Senor Quentin go up?" asked one of the pirates, addressing St. Vale, and pointing to the handcuffed officer.

"As the booty does," was the short reply, and Quentin, without raising his bowed head, or offering the slightest resistance, suffered his comrades to place him in the net, and he was drawn in safety to the top.

Next followed the dead body of the woman, and then the maiden and St. Vale ascended the rope ladder.

To the surprise of the young officer the rock was hollow, and rudely constructed wooden steps were ranged around its sides to the bottom, where a lantern was visible, for some of the pirates had already gone down.

There were shelves here and there upon which the booty was placed, while the rope-ladder having been drawn up, and one man left on the rock to watch, the remainder of the party descended to the depths below, which St. Vale knew, from the distance gone, went far down into the island.

In places caverns ran off from the funnel-

like opening of the rock, and at length they came to the bottom, for there was a pool of water, bubbling fiercely up from the dark depths, and flowing out under a natural tunnel of rock.

Several of the pirates were drawing upon a rope, and soon a large, flat-bottomed boat was hauled into the pool, and all got into it and floated into the rocky tunnel.

A short space of total darkness, and then came light, as the barge moved out into a basin surrounded by rock upon three sides, and open on one, and to the surprise of St. Vale and the captives, in this channel-way lay moored a schooner of a hundred tons.

The pirates seemed to enjoy the surprise of the captives, but their glances at St. Vale revealed to them no sign upon his face that he had not before heard of the secret retreat, while in fact he was as amazed at the mysterious discoveries as were the others.

Glancing around him he saw that the mass of rock surrounding the basin wholly shut off approach from the island by any other route than the one in which they had come, and that the vessel moored in the narrow channel could hoist sail and be out in deep water within a minute's time, while a boat encircling the island would never suspect a break in those apparently solid walls of rock.

Upon the schooner the captives were placed, and St. Vale bore the body of the dead mother into the cabin for her daughter to prepare it for burial.

Then he returned to the basin, and getting into the boat with a couple of men, was pulled back to the tower rock, which he ascended, and was informed by the guard left there that the boats of the brig had come ashore and the crew were searching the island.

This fact soon became very evident, for their voices were distinctly heard, and soon the smoke and flames of the burning huts were visible.

With the power he held over the pirates St. Vale knew that he could then and there master the men with him, and lead the crew of the Vulture by that secret way to the schooner in the basin; but for some reason of his own he made no such attempt, and calmly sat there watching from his safe retreat his comrades searching the island, while some of them came so near that he could have dropped a stone upon their heads.

Yet grim, stern and quiet he remained in the pirate secret retreat, evidently plotting some daring act in his mind, in spite of his calm face.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MYSTERIOUS BUCCANEER.

FROM his high look-out St. Vale saw the retreat of the crew to the boats after their unsuccessful search of the island, and even his eye was deceived by the dummies rigged out to represent men, and he believed all had returned to the brig.

But expecting another search on the morrow the pirates determined not to leave their place of concealment.

"You come with me, sir," said St. Vale, addressing a young man, the most intelligent-looking of the whole band of pirates, and one whom he had observed often when on the brigantine as a man strangely out of place on a buccaneer deck.

"The rest of you remain on guard here," he continued, referring to the other pirates crouching in the hollow rock.

Without a word the young man followed St. Vale down the rope ladder, which was at once drawn up again, and the two set off together to a point where they could command a view of the sea.

It was just dark, and they could see that the Vulture had run in as near as she dared and dropped anchor, and that all on board looked as though her departure would not be hurried.

After watching the vessel for awhile St. Vale suddenly confronted his companion, and the muzzle of his pistol was pushed hard over the heart of the surprised young buccaneer, while he said sternly:

"Move or cry out and my finger draws on the trigger; reply to my questions and you have nothing to fear."

The young pirate, though evidently amazed, did not flinch, nor did his eyes quail while he asked calmly:

"What would the senor know of me that he asks it at the muzzle of his pistol?"

"First, how long have you been a pirate?"

"It is five years since I became a member of the Black Pirates' band."

"You are not a Spaniard?"

"No, senor, an American."

"Crime has driven you to piracy?"

Even in the dim light St. Vale saw the eyes flash, as the answer suddenly burst from his lips:

"No, senor, but revenge drove me to piracy."

"Revenge?"

But the young man remained silent, for he seemed to feel that he had said too much.

"A strange motive for becoming a pirate?" inquiringly said the officer.

But still the young pirate remained silent, and St. Vale asked:

"Do you like the life you lead?"

"I have a contempt for it, senor."

"Then why not give it up?"

"Senor, from the time I saw you come on board the brigantine I have felt that you were playing a part, and when you sprung into the proa to-day I was the more convinced of it."

"Be frank with me and I will be with you."

St. Vale could not but give the youth credit for wonderful power of perception, but was not to be caught off his guard, so replied:

"How mean you that I am playing a part?"

"The men may believe it, but I do not, that you are sincere, although you carry the Golden Fetters," was the bold reply.

"In what do you doubt me?"

"Frankly, senor, I believe you are plotting our ruin."

"You are frank to say the least of it, and if you have a contempt for your evil career and your pirate comrades, you will doubtless be willing to be my friend," cautiously said St. Vale.

"Senor, do you believe in a God?" came the abrupt answer.

"I do."

"Will you swear before that God that you will not betray me, even if you are heart, body and soul a pirate?"

"I will."

"You swear?"

"Yes."

"Then I am a woman."

St. Vale fairly started at this discovery, and gazed earnestly into the clear-cut face before him, while he said in a low tone:

"By Heaven! I believe you speak the truth."

"I do, senor; now tell me who and what you are?"

"First tell me the motive you had in leagu- ing yourself with pirates?"

"I have told you, senor, it is to revenge a wrong."

"Who did that wrong?"

"Ebony, the Black Pirate."

"Hail then you became one of his band to revenge yourself upon him?"

"Yes, senor."

"And yet have been five years a member of his band without avenging yourself?"

"I have laid plan after plan, which something has always prevented my carrying out, for I want that red-headed monster wholly in my power before I act, and then sweet will be my revenge," and the disguised woman spoke with savage earnestness.

"Does the Black Pirate suspect you?"

"Ah, no, senor, for did he do so I would not live an instant."

"He believes me dead, and so believing little dreamed that there was in his fore-castle a woman in male attire, who lived but for revenge on him."

"Now, senor, I have trusted you."

"Yes, and strange as it may seem to you, I have always thought, since I saw you on the brigantine, that there was a mystery hanging over your life, and it was because I needed a friend that I bade you come with me to-night."

"And you too seek revenge upon Captain Ebony?"

"Yes, I seek to string him up to the yard-arm for his crimes."

"No, no; you can hang his crew, senor, but he is my game as long as he lives, and then you may ornament the fore-truck with his hideous head if you wish," and the woman spoke in a voice that quivered with passion.

Deeply impressed with her words and manner, St. Vale remained silent for an instant, and then said:

"Well, there is work for you and I to do, and from this night we are sworn allies in a good cause."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WARNING.

"FRANK is the name my comrades know me by, senor," said the pretended youth, in answer to St. Vale's question as to what was his name, as the two retraced their way toward the rock tower.

Suddenly the woman, or rather Frank, as I must now call her, came to a halt, and said:

"Senor, do you hear that low moaning sound?"

"Yes."

"It is the sure precursor of a storm in these islands, for the sea seems to grow restless here when the tempest is far off, and dashing into the water worn caverns and against the hollow rocks, causes that sound."

"Well, Frank?"

"Your vessel is in danger."

"My vessel?"

"Yes, the brig from which you came."

"Hail say you so?" said St. Vale, quickly.

"Yes, senor, for no matter from whence comes the storm, where she now is at anchor is a most dangerous position, and she will go to pieces, for no anchor will hold on that rock bottom."

"Then I shall sacrifice all other motives, and go on board and warn them to put to sea."

"No, senor, you would but end the good work you have begun, and I can tell you a better plan."

"Quick! what is it?"

"I will go out and pilot her to a safe anchorage."

"You?"

"Yes, senor, for I spent three years of wretchedness on this island, and then my only pastime was in learning these waters, and no one knows them better, not even the Black Pirate, as he is now called."

"You can, then, and will pilot the brig to a safe anchorage?"

"I pledge you my word, senor; but you must return to the retreat and state that you left me on the Point of Rocks as a look-out, for our absence may attract suspicion, and when I have run the brig to a place of safety, I will come to the Tower Rock and report that she has sailed up the coast."

"Very well, I will go on to the retreat," and while Frank went back toward the shore St. Vale continued on toward the Tower Rock, to be suddenly confronted, as he was passing the burned shanties, by Lord Cecil Milnor.

The result of their meeting the reader already knows, and it left St. Vale anxious indeed, for knowing that some of the crew were on the island, he feared they might capture his disguised companion.

Hastening on to the retreat, to lull any suspicion by his presence, that might be aroused in the minds of the pirates, he hailed the look-out and instantly ascended the rope ladder that was lowered for him.

"Where is Frank, senor?" asked one of the pirates.

"I left him at the Point of Rocks, as a look-out, for the brig has anchored, and evidently intends to renew the search to-morrow," he said, quickly.

"They'll never find us, senor, and if the signs around us of a coming storm do not deceive us, we'll have hard work to find even the brig's bones to-morrow, for the spot she is anchored we of the island call the Devil's Jaws," remarked the same man who had asked about the supposed youth, and who was next in command to Jacques Quentin.

"It's a pity to see a brave ship go down," said St. Vale feelingly.

"No, senor, for the pity is for us who are hunted by the navy hounds of England and the States."

"I've got no pity for them, but can laugh while they drown, for they have dogged my wake on the seas for a score of years."

"You have been a long time a pirate, my man."

"Yes, senor, a long time while you are new at the business of piracy; but I was with the Sea Vampire, and learned my trade under him."

"Under that famous rover whose vessel was sunk with all on board by an American vessel of war some years ago?"

"Yes, senor, the same, and he was a devil too, was the Vampire of the Sea, and well won the name they gave him."

"He showed no mercy, loved to fight a vessel-of-war the same as a treasure-ship,"

though he got but iron from one and gold from the other."

"And the Black Pirate is something like him in that respect."

"Yes, senor, he loves red work just as well, and is more cruel to his men, than the Vampire was; but hark! how the sea moans among the rocks."

"There's going to be a regular old-fashioned blow, I'm thinking; but let it come and scatter that British bull-dog's bones upon the rocks, and to-morrow, we'll have rare picking of dead men's pockets."

The other pirates laughed gleefully at this awful prospect for the poor seamen of the brig, and fretted at their cruelty St. Vale said:

"I'll return and have a look at the sea, I believe, and see if the brig's officers have an idea of their danger."

"Not they, unless they've got some Carribbee sailor on board who knows signs in these waters."

"Do you want company, senor?"

"No, I shall go alone," and St. Vale descended the ladder and set off in the direction of the Point of Rocks.

But hardly had he gotten out of sight when the pirate officer said something in a low tone to one of the men on the rock, and instantly he slipped down the ladder and glided away after the lieutenant, as stealthy as an Indian in his movements, and as dangerous.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PILOT.

WHEN Frank, the disguised woman, who had allied herself with pirates, from a motive of revenge, parted with the English lieutenant, he, as I shall speak of her while in disguise, went at a light, swinging step down toward the beach of the harbor.

But suddenly he dropped flat upon his face and lay like one dead.

But only for a short while did he remain thus, and then he began to move slowly back in the direction from whence he had come.

After dragging himself some thirty paces from the spot whence he had fallen, he reached a boulder and sought refuge behind it, while he muttered:

"Pretty close, that, and I am thankful to the jolly fellow who laughed and warned me that all of the brig's crew had not left the island."

Going at a right angle from the direction he had before been pursuing, he soon found himself out upon a point of rocks, wild and dreary in the extreme.

Down these he went with wonderful ease, considering that both hands and feet were needed to carry him, and after descending some sixty feet he stopped in front of a small cave, a rod above the water of the sea.

Crawling into this dark cavity, he soon reappeared, drawing after him a long, narrow canoe.

There was a rope at either end, and taking hold of these he lowered the light canoe into the water, and sliding down the face of the rock, skillfully dropped into the center of the frail craft, and instantly seizing a paddle, sent it flying over the dark waters.

The place where he had left the shore was on the outer side of the island, and the point of rocks separated him from the basin, where the crew on shore were hiding, so he felt no anxiety of being seen by them.

So dark was his canoe and dress, and so noiselessly did it go over the waters that he ran up to the gangway unchallenged, and unseen, though Sir Roslyn and all of his officers were on deck.

Fastening his light craft, he bounded lightly over the bulwark, to suddenly startle two young officers pacing to and fro in the brig's waist.

"Pardon me, senores, but I would see your captain," he said quickly, without giving them time to address him.

"Where did you come from so suddenly?" asked one of the middies.

"Over the ship's side, senor."

"That is evident; but from whence did you come, what did you come for, where are you going, and what is your name?" and the questioning middy assumed an air of importance designed to impress the stranger.

But it failed; for the quiet response was:

"I am not here to enlist, senor, and my business here is with older heads than yours."

"Ah!"

"Better take him to the baronet, Ned, said the other."

"Thank you; but I can find him myself."

But the middy was not going to be cheated this way, and seizing the arm of the apparent youth, and who offered no resistance, he led him aft to the quarter-deck, and said pompously:

"Sir Roslyn, I found this fellow sneaking on board the brig, sir, and I have brought him to your presence."

Frank burst into a ringing laugh, and saluting, said politely:

"I came openly on board, sir, but your watch have poor eyes and did not see me until I sprung on deck."

"Well, my merry lad, why are you here?" asked Sir Roslyn.

"Because, sir, I have no desire to see your gallant craft and brave crew go to wreck and death within the next few hours."

"Ha! and what danger threatens us?" asked Sir Roslyn, quickly.

"As I said, sir, wreck and death from the tempest."

"But the skies are as clear as crystal, and the sea as calm as a lake; you must get some better excuse than that, my lad, for coming on board of His Majesty's brig Vulture, and coming from a pirate island to boot."

"Do you hear that moaning sound, sir?"

"Yes, I have heard it for an hour past?"

"It has grown louder in that time."

"Why, yes."

"And have you not noticed that, though the sea is so calm, senor, your vessel tugs harder and harder at her anchor?"

"Well, we have all noticed it and spoken of it, and set it down as from the flowing of some current around this island."

"You are wrong, senor captain; the moaning is the echo of the sea in the water caverns of the island, and the restless motion is the rebound from the tempest yet leagues away."

"By Neptune! but I believe you are right, for I have heard of such precursors of storms being known in these southern latitudes and islands."

"But tell me, my lad, from whence do you come so mysteriously?" and Sir Roslyn gazed fixedly at the pretended youth.

"As you said, senor, from the Pirate Island."

"Ha! are you one of the band?"

"I am, senor captain."

"A self-confessed pirate, by the gods of war!"

"But tell me, have you come on board here to put your neck in the hangman's noose?"

"No, senor."

"For what, then?"

"To save your lives and your brig, senor," was the quiet response.

"In what way, pray?"

"By becoming your pilot and running your vessel to a safe anchorage."

"And do you think I will trust you, a self-confessed pirate, at the wheel of my vessel?" sternly asked Sir Roslyn.

"I have trusted myself, a self-confessed pirate, on your decks, and with the only motive, senor, to serve you."

"Ha! my thrust well turned; but tell me, what have you done with an officer of mine you captured to-day through his recklessness?"

"He is with the band, senor."

"Then, if you wish to serve me, lead me to their hiding-place, and you shall receive a golden reward."

"Senor, there are chests of gold on yonder island, and I am, besides, no traitor."

"I have warned you, and if you will not heed my warning, then raise your anchor and stand far out to sea, and when the tempest is over, return."

"If you wish to remain on the coast now, I will pilot you to a safe harbor, and your men ashore can go there in their boats."

"Ha! you know, then, that some of my crew are ashore?" quickly asked Sir Roslyn.

"Oh, yes, senor."

"And your motive in wishing to save us, your enemies, is simply—what?"

"To prove to you that one may have a heart, even if he sails under the black flag," was the bold reply.

"I will trust you, for I notice how uneasy the brig is getting, and that moaning sound grows louder."

"If I fail you, senor, make my life the forfeit," was the cool reply, as the pretended youth walked toward the wheel and laid his hands upon it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SPY.

WHEN Leon St. Vale left the Rock Tower, as the pirates called the funnel-like elevation, by which they gained their secret retreat, it was on account of the great anxiety he felt regarding the Vulture, which would not allow him to await the return of Frank.

Going to the same point of land where he had before stood, and from whence a good view could be obtained of the sea and the vessel, he noticed that in the time in which he had been away, although the skies were still clear, the waters seemed to rise and fall more uneasily, and the moaning sound was louder, while an occasional wave fell heavily upon the beach, though there was but the faintest breeze blowing.

As he turned his gaze upon the brig he saw the sails suddenly let fall, and a moment after the vessel glided slowly away from her anchorage, went quietly about, and stood toward the end of the island, which seemed nothing more than a mass of rocks.

Watching her, he saw her continue her course for a mile, and head inshore, until she seemed to be going directly upon the high rocks that formed a barrier at the island's end, when she suddenly luffed up sharply, and the splash of her anchor when let go distinctly came to his ears.

At the same time he felt a light puff of wind at his back, and turning to note if the storm was coming from that direction, his quick eye caught sight of a dark form dart back into the shelter of a rock.

Apparently not noticing it, he raised his sea-glass, which he wore around his neck, as though looking at the distant brig, while in reality it was at the side of his head and his eyes were carefully scanning the rock and its surroundings.

As he divided different objects he gazed upon he saw that one was a crouching form instead of a rock, and he now felt confident that his steps were dogged.

Had Lord Cecil been following him since their meeting? he wondered.

No, that was not like the young nobleman.

Had the pirates set a watch on his steps?

That did not seem unlikely, and yet they had seemed to trust him wholly.

Perhaps it was some of the crew from the Vulture, who had remained with Lord Cecil?

If so, he cared not to injure them.

Neither did he care to have any one of them, other than Lord Cecil, know that he was not held as a prisoner.

After running over these thoughts, watching the crouching form the while, at the same time holding the glass to his head, under pretense of watching the Vulture, he turned his gaze once more toward the brig, and detected several dark objects upon the water.

Attentively he watched them until they disappeared in the basin where the brig's crew had landed.

That they were boats he well knew.

Waiting patiently for some fifteen minutes, and still observing that the crouching form did not move, he saw the dark objects reappear and move in the direction of the brig.

Still patiently watching them through his glass, though never losing sight for more than a second, of the form within twenty feet of him, he beheld one boat gliding swiftly over the waters, round the point, and come in close under the cliff upon which he stood.

He now felt that it must be the pretended youth returning from the Vulture and he was convinced that the person so quiet near him was not one of the brig's crew.

It must therefore be one of the pirates from the rock, who had dogged his steps.

From the position of the one spying his movements he could see that he had also seen the brig move quietly to another anchorage, the boat come back from it, the boats going to it, and the return of the solitary craft.

If one of the pirates he must know that some one of his comrades had been the brig's pilot, and who could it be excepting Frank, as the others of the band were all in the secret retreat?

If Frank was suspected, then he would be, and that would ruin his whole plot by making him a prisoner, and perhaps cost him his life.

To betray a knowledge of the presence of a foe, might cause him to fly, so he must act cautiously.

With an impatient exclamation he lowered his glass and said:

"Why don't the boy come? I'll not wait longer for him."

He moved away as he spoke, but suddenly, with a tremendous leap, sprung upon the crouching foe.

That it was unexpected was evident, as a half-cry of terror broke from the man's lips, and that was choked off by a firm gripe upon his throat.

In vain was it that he attempted to use his knife, for St. Vale had prepared against that by grasping his right hand with his own.

The man was wiry, and very strong; but St. Vale had never met his equal, and found himself the master of his foe.

He did not care to kill him, and yet he knew not what to do with him.

At that moment a third person appeared upon the scene, coming over the edge of the cliff.

It was Frank, and he started back at the sight that met his gaze.

But recognizing him, St. Vale called out:

"Ho, Frank! who have I here that was spying upon my actions?"

"Ah, senior, it is you?" and Frank bounded to his side.

"Yes; is this one of the men?"

"Let me see his ugly face."

"Now," and St. Vale wrenched it round for him to look at.

"Yes, senior, it is the man we call *El Cobra*, and he is properly named, for he is a snake of the worst kind."

"Then I am glad I caught him," and St. Vale tightened his gripe upon him.

"Holy Padre! but with what ease you hold him, senior. Why he is our best man; but what does he know?"

"He has been watching me for half an hour."

"Watching you?"

"Yes, I saw him suddenly dodge behind that rock, and pretending not to see him, watched him."

"Did you speak aloud?"

"No."

"What did he see?"

"You going and coming."

"Ah! then, senior, he must die."

"Die?"

"Yes, senior."

"Do you mean it, Frank?"

"Do you prize your life or his, the most, now?" was the significant question.

"My own, of course."

"Then kill him."

St. Vale was fairly startled at the cool way the advice to take life was given, and echoed:

"Kill him?"

"Yes, senior."

"How?"

"Knife him."

"Do you think he would betray us?"

"Will poison kill?"

"Is there no place we can secure him?"

"None."

"Can we not take him on board the brig, or rather you take him there?"

"Do you see yonder cloud, senior?"

"Yes," and St. Vale looked in the direction that Frank pointed, and beheld a dark line sweeping up over the skies.

"Yes."

"It will strike us before I could reach the brig."

"I hate to take his life in such a matter-of-fact way."

"He would take yours with real joy; but if you don't care to knife him, just hurl him over this cliff and that will do the work, and the sea will wash out all stains before morning."

St. Vale was at a loss what to do. To kill a man in action was one thing; to kill him when he was in his power was far different.

He glanced at the pretended youth, then at the rapidly-approaching storm, whose roar was now becoming fearful, and then at the face of the man, whose throat he still held with force enough to keep him passive.

"Quick, senior, or all will be lost," cried the pretended youth.

Still St. Vale hesitated.

"For God's sake, kill him, senior, or my knife shall enter his heart."

St. Vale hesitated no longer, but dragging the now fiercely struggling pirate to the edge of the cliff, by a mighty effort hurled him from him.

There was a wild, hoarse shriek, a dark form shot downward, a crash was heard upon the rocks below, and then came in earnest tones:

"Thank God! now come, senior, or the tempest will strike us here, and we will be blown into the sea."

Seizing the arm of St. Vale the supposed youth hurried him along, passed through the thicket, illumined by vivid lightning, and the next instant they had reached the rock.

Up the ladder they hastened, and a place of safety was gained, just as the tornado broke with a shock that made the island tremble from end to end.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MIDNIGHT ASSASSIN.

It was a grand sight for St. Vale to witness the tornado from the Tower Rock, and noting its fury, he several times asked Frank, who crouched near him, if the brig was certainly in safety.

"As safe as you are, senior; I saw her into what we call the Reef Haven, where the sea is as calm as a pond, and only her topmasts will catch the full force of the blow."

"And the captain trusted you?"

"He did, and I like him, senior; after anchoring the brig I went after the boats, and found the same officer in charge whom we held captive here."

"Lord Cecil Milnor?"

"Yes, that is his name, and he is a brave man to make the struggle for freedom he did to-day; but there is Ostel, our second officer; ask him where he sent one of the men we left here."

The last was whispered to St. Vale, as the officer, who had before communed with the lieutenant, approached and said:

"*El Tornado* nearly caught you, senior?"

"Yes, but Frank warned me in time."

"Did you watch its effect upon the brig, senior?"

"No, for the brig had already sailed."

"Sailed! And where?" asked the man in surprise.

"I am not her commander, Senior Ostel, to know her destination."

"She could not have sailed from there without a pilot, senior."

"Perhaps she had one, as I saw a small boat put off toward her."

"What, senior? A small boat put off to the brig?"

"Yes: are any of your crew missing, Senior Ostel?"

"Well, no, senior, but—"

"There was a man here when I left, who is not here now."

"Ah yes, that was *El Cobra*. By the cross! but he must be the one, for I sent him to the basin to see if the brig's crew destroyed our boats, and he has not returned."

"Curse him! he has proven traitor!"

"If so, I shall hold you responsible, Senior Ostel, for I gave orders that no one should leave this retreat," sternly said St. Vale.

"But, senior—"

"There is no excuse; if your man has been the traitor to save the brig, he will be treacherous enough to bring her crew upon us here, and if he does, you shall suffer for it."

Ostel remained silent, for he saw that he had a master, and giving orders to the guard to kill any one attempting to leave Tower Rock, without his permission, St. Vale turned away.

"You do not mean Senior Ostel, captain?" queried the guard.

"I do mean Senior Ostel, or any one else," and St. Vale descended the rude steps leading down to the water tunnel, and was accompanied by Frank, who whispered:

"You rule well, senior, and the only way you can govern these devils is to make them fear you."

Arriving on the schooner St. Vale sought the cabin, at the door of which stood a guard, for the captives were within.

The cabin had two state-rooms, and one of these had been given, at St. Vale's command, to the maiden, and the other to the three gentlemen passengers.

In the center of the cabin lay the dead form of the poor woman whom death had relieved from captivity, and St. Vale noticed that she had been prepared for burial in the sea, for a hammock infolded her.

Putting the lamp out St. Vale threw himself upon a sofa under the transom, and, lulled by the gentle rocking of the schooner and the roar of the storm among the rocks overhead, he soon sunk to sleep.

What awakened him he never knew, unless it was the presence of danger, for all was as still in the cabin as the dead form resting near.

But, without rising he lay awake listening, and soon his sensitive ears heard suppressed breathing.

It was not the breathing of a person asleep; neither was it like one naturally drawing breath.

That it was not from the state rooms he knew as well as he did that it did not come from the corpse.

No one had been in the cabin proper when he had laid down, and he had not examined the gangway leading forward.

Involuntarily he raised his hands over his heart, and as he did so he touched a human hand.

Instantly he grasped it, and it held a knife.

Fearfully the one he held tried to get away, but he kept his gripe with a power that could not be shaken off, while he called out to the guard to fetch a light.

A moment after a battle-lantern flashed in the cabin, borne in the hands of Frank, and it revealed a scared, beautiful face looking out of the door of one state-room, three startled visages gazing from the other, the corpse resting quietly, to the relief of those that had believed it had been walking in ghostly form, and under the transom, on the starboard side, lay a man on his back, and another knelt upon his breast, and held his hands in an iron gripe.

And those hands were in golden manacles, and one of them still clasped a keen-bladed knife, which told the story of an attempted assassination.

"Take this fellow forward and chain him to the deck," was St. Vale's calm command to several pirates who had hastened to the scene, and, muttering curses Jacques Quentin was led from the cabin, and his intended victim threw himself down to rest with seeming indifference to the danger he had escaped.

As St. Vale went on deck after sunrise, Frank hastily approached him and asked in a low tone:

"Have you forgotten, senior, the prisoner?"

"Quentin?"

"Yes, senior."

"No, I shall take care of him to-day."

"But, senior, the time is nearly up."

"The time? What time?"

"The law of the Golden Fetters."

"What law?"

"Why, senior, can it be possible that you do not know the law of the Manacles of Gold?" asked Frank in surprise.

"I know of no law regarding them."

"Then, senior, why did you place them upon his wrists?"

"Because I had them in my pocket by accident, and thought they would come in well."

Frank looked puzzled, and after a momentary silence, said:

"Senior, Captain Ebony should have told you about them when he gave them to you."

"Captain Ebony never gave them to me, nor did he ever see them."

"There is some mystery here, senior."

"So it seems, so please solve it."

"May I ask you where you got them?"

"I inherited them," bitterly said the young officer.

"Senior, come with me aside, while I tell you what a power is your inheritance with the Caribbee pirates, for your words, your manner, prove to me that you are innocent of the secret power of those Golden Fetters, and the laws that are connected with them."

There was something in the manner of the speaker that impressed St. Vale strangely, and leaping from the schooner to the rocks, he walked with him out of earshot of any curiously-inclined pirate that might be watching them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SECRET POWER.

"SENIOR, your placing the Golden Fetters upon Senior Quentin, when he was mutinous, led us all to believe that you fully knew their power, and the very act doomed him to death," said Frank, the disguised woman, when she had walked a short distance away with St. Vale.

"Indeed! this is remarkable, Frank, for those fetters of gold are the crest of my name and home, and they were willed to me as my only inheritance."

"How is it that they happen to be the

secret signet of this outlaw band?" said St. Vale, in deep surprise.

"Senor captain, all I can tell you regarding them is that the Black Pirate claimed them as his family's crest, and when he organized his sea-robbers into a league he bound them by solemn oaths, oh, so fearful, that no matter what he should demand of them in the name of the Golden Fetters, they would perform, and if one came to them bearing them, he or she were to be obeyed as himself, while the one upon whose wrists he placed them must consider that as his death-warrant."

"This is remarkable; and my having incidentally slipped them upon the wrists of Senor Quentin was as a sentence of death to him?"

"Yes, senor."

"Well, I'll let it go as it is then for the present, for richly he deserves death."

"Senor, if within eighteen hours after they are placed upon the victim's wrists, he is not executed, then by the law of the Fetters he is pardoned."

"Ah! then I'll see that Senor Quentin gets no pardon on that score; but tell me, Frank, are you bound to this League, by the same oath?"

"I am, senor."

"And you took this oath to get means to carry out your revenge against this black demon?"

"Senor, that was my purpose; but let me tell you frankly who and what I am if you will hear me?" said the disguised woman in a voice that trembled.

"Certainly I will hear you, Frank."

The woman remained silent a moment and then said:

"My father was a planter on the Mississippi river above New Orleans, and I loved a young man who was my brother's tutor."

"A poor man, with only his salary, my father would not hear to my becoming his wife, but insisted that I should marry a man whom I hardly knew and did not like."

"This person was a man of giant form almost, very handsome, and said to be a gentleman of wealth living in Jamaica."

"As my father became greatly embarrassed in his estate, at his and my mother's earnest pleadings, I became that man's wife, and went with him to his home in Jamaica."

"But I had not been long there when the truth of what my husband really was dawned upon me in all its fearful horror, for one night a party of sailors, under an officer from a man-of-war, came to the pleasant home where we lived, to make my husband a prisoner, and for what, senor?"

"A smuggler, doubtless, as many merchants living on the island some years ago, I have heard made fortunes in that nefarious calling," said St. Vale.

"Ah senor, would to God that that was all; no, he was none other than that Scourge of the Sea, known as *The Ocean Vampire*."

"Good God! that demon, second only in cruelty to Ebony, the Black Pirate?" cried St. Vale in amazement.

"Yes, senor, that was the fiend I had married; but when the officers came to take him, having tracked him to his home, where he pretended to be a wealthy gentleman, he seized me in his arms, beat them back, and escaped to his yacht, anchored in the harbor near where we lived, and put to sea."

"He brought me to his island, where, as I once before told you, I had passed some years."

"It was not his regular rendezvous then, as he had another stronghold, and his ransom captives and treasures only were kept here; but at last I escaped, with a party of captives in a small sail boat, and his very vessel sighted us at sea and we were retaken, my poor unfortunates were killed before my eyes, and I was brought back in irons, to his island, and here I remained for months, until I again made my escape, through the aid of his slave who had more mercy than his master."

"I reached New Orleans, and that very night was met and recognised by the Vampire; but as he placed his hand upon me I fired full in his face."

"He fell, as though dead, and was quickly borne off by some of his comrades, while I fled like a deer from the spot."

"Alas! I found my parents dead, my brother gone, and I was going to a convent to end my days, when I learned from the Vampire's slave that his master was not dead."

"The powder had disfigured his face fear-

fully, but the bullet had glanced on the bone of his forehead, and the wound had not been a severe one."

"Instantly I swore revenge, and, senor, I assumed this disguise to carry it out."

"My poor friend, you have, indeed, my sympathy in your misfortune and sorrow; but what cause of hatred have you against the Black Pirate, too?"

The disguised woman smiled, and then said in a low tone:

"He, too, is disguised, senor, for that black face is stained, a wig of wool hides his hair, and the Black Pirate is he that was known as the Ocean Vampire."

"Ha! then by Heaven we will do the world double service by capturing him; but come and I will test the full power of these Golden Fetters, and begin one good work," and there was a grim smile upon St. Vale's stern face as he retraced his way to the schooner, that boded no good to Jacques Quentin, the pirate lieutenant.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WORK BEGUN.

"SENOR ORTEL, bring the prisoner, Jacques Quentin, on deck, and summon the crew to witness punishment," was St. Vale's stern order, as he stepped on board the schooner after his talk with Frank, the deserted wife of the pirate chief.

"But, senor, the men would like to ask of you the pardon of poor Senor Jacques."

"It is useless; had I intended mercy to him I would not have placed upon him the Golden Fetters, and it is the law of the League that he dies, for he was mutinous."

"But, senor—"

"Ortel, is it your desire to wear those fetters as soon as I have hanged Jacques Quentin?"

This question was too significant for Ortel to fail to understand, and he quickly saluted, and going below soon returned with the pirate lieutenant, while the men began to gather quickly, and the captives, excepting the maiden.

"Mercy, senor, for I was mad and knew not what I did," groaned Quentin as he was led in the waist and glanced nervously up to the yard-arm, upon which one of the crew was rigging a rope with which to hang him.

"No, you deserve death for breaking the laws of the League, and in my heart there is neither mercy nor pity for you, Jacques Quentin," was St. Vale's stern reply.

The crew stood in a row, silent and almost indifferent-looking, for the officer had never been popular with them.

"Are you ready there?" called out St. Vale to the two men who were rigging the noose.

"Yes, senor."

"Then haul that man up into the air!"

The noose was placed around the neck of the doomed man, who now stood silent and with bowed head, uttering no cry or prayer, and still there was some delay.

"Senor Ortel, are you trying to take Senor Quentin's place by delaying your work until the eighteen hours are passed, which pardon him, for it lacks but a very short while until they are?"

Again Ortel took the hint, and not at all anxious to take the place of the pirate lieutenant, he now seemed as hurried to have the affair over as he had been anxious to delay it before.

Then up into the air, without a word or cry, went the crime-blackened villain, and all stood watching him until life was extinct.

"Senor Ortel, you are to act as my first officer, Senor Frank, you are to act as second, and I wish the schooner gotten ready to put to sea to-night."

"But first have that wretch cut down and thrown overboard," and St. Vale turned and entered the cabin, his words being a great surprise to the crew, not one of whom dared question, however, his motives.

Upon entering the cabin St. Vale found Lena La Rue, the captive maiden, sitting by the side of her dead mother, and said to her in a low, kind tone:

"Miss La Rue, let me relieve your mind by telling you that you shall be returned in safety to your friends—nay, no thanks, and be careful not to let my crew know what I have promised you."

"To-night the schooner sails, and if you would prefer that your mother should be buried at sea, we will consign her body to the

deep after we have gained an offing from the island; but if you prefer she shall have a grave on land, I will have one dug at once."

The maiden seemed overcome by the kindness of the man she believed a pirate officer, and said, softly:

"Oh, sir, you are indeed good to me, and the name you are branded with you surely do not deserve."

"But my poor mother had such a horror of the sea while living, I feel that it would be a comfort to me to bury her on the island."

"It shall be as you wish, Miss La Rue," and leaving the cabin the orders were given to dig a grave, the captives bore the body to it, and one of them repeated the burial service above the remains, and the end had come, the poor, suffering woman had at last found rest in the tomb.

Going upon the top of the Rock Tower, St. Vale saw that the Vulture still remained at her anchorage, once more diligently searching the island.

As though seized with a sudden thought, he retraced his way to the schooner and wrote upon a piece of paper the following:

"Captain Sir Roslyn Stannis:

"Sir—After nightfall the one who hands you this will pilot the Vulture out into deep water, and then sail for the neighborhood of the Bermudas, where you will be joined by a schooner that will bring to you important information. ST. VALE, Lieutenant, Royal Navy."

Calling to the disguised woman, he said:

"Frank, take this and come to the Tower Rock just before sunset, and I will meet you there and send you out to reconnoiter as an excuse for you to go at once on board the Vulture."

"Give this to her commander, pilot her out into deep water, and return here quickly, and we will set sail to-night."

"Do you understand?"

"Fully, senor."

Two hours after the two met in the Tower Rock, and St. Vale bade the guard to let the supposed young man pass out.

The crew of the brig were nowhere visible, but the Vulture still lay at her anchorage, and as the shades of night fell, Sir Roslyn had become exceedingly anxious, for he said to Lord Cecil, who had been all day searching the island:

"That clever young pirate got us into a safe place, in which to ride out that savage tornado; but it looks as though we were to stay here until Doomsday, for I can see no way out, and was foolish not to think of how we were to get to sea again before I allowed him to depart."

"There is a boat coming off now, sir," said Lord Cecil, who had been attentively glancing shoreward while Sir Roslyn was talking.

"Indeed! then it may be the young fellow coming out to do the handsome thing, and if so, I have misjudged him."

"I do hope he can give me more tidings of poor St. Vale."

Lord Cecil said nothing about what tidings he could give, and five minutes after Frank stood on the Vulture's quarter-deck.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ADRIFT.

It was a night of fearful storm at sea, and over the tempest-swept waters a vessel was driving madly along, her masts stripped of all canvas, and her crew lashed to the rigging and bulwarks, for the decks were constantly drowned by huge waves that swept them.

At the wheel stood three men, and near them a tall form, which, when a vivid flash of lightning illumined the sea, the reader recognizes as Lord St. Vale.

In fact, a glance at the vessel, and the pirate schooner that lay in the secret basin at the island is revealed.

Mastering the outlaw crew by his will and daring, aided by his being the possessor of the Golden Fetters, the young lieutenant had put to sea for some reason of his own.

He had not met the first stiff breeze before he found that the schooner was fearfully unseaworthy.

In the past she had been fleet as a bird and stanch and buoyant, but her pirate commander had hurled her against many a stout hull he had robbed, had driven her into many a hard fight, and the iron hail rained down upon her from her foes had weakened and shattered her.

Patching up did not suffice, and when on her

northward course she had been caught in the fearful gale, St. Vale felt doubts of her standing the test.

To put canvas upon her but strained her, and he put her before the gale until he felt that she was settling fast and that the end must come.

Realizing that she was leaking at a dangerous rate, he suddenly gave the order to spread what sail was necessary to lay her to, and then, as if in pity for the bold mariners the tempest abated.

But the boats were stored with provisions, and those on board divided into three crews.

With St. Vale in the long-boat went Lena La Rue, the three male captives, Frank, and eight oarsmen, and the rest of the crew divided themselves in the two cutters.

One by one the boats were loaded and cast loose from the sinking schooner, and not a moment too soon, as, with a fearful plunge it went down into the watery depths, just as they got well cleared from her.

For awhile the three boats, adrift upon the storm-swept waters, kept near together; but then there came a renewal of the storm, they were separated, and one was seen to sink beneath the waves, and their comrades could lend no aid.

Shortly after those in the long-boat lost sight of the remaining cutter, and they were alone upon the deep, with a frail support between them and eternity.

But Leon St. Vale was a thorough seaman in every respect, and he watched every motion of the boat, every threatening wave and cross-sea, and those who were his comrades in danger and misfortune felt the utmost confidence in his ability to save them, if in the power of mortal man to do so.

But though the tempest blew itself out the hours dragged their weary length along until a day and a night had passed, and then on until days had gone by and no friendly sail hove in sight to relieve them.

In sympathy for Lena La Rue, St. Vale had rigged her up a canvas covering and made her as comfortable as the circumstances would admit, while, calling Frank to his side, as he sat at the tiller one night while the others slept, he begged her to make her true sex known and share with the maiden the little comfort to be obtained on the long-boat.

But this the pretended youth steadily and firmly refused to do, and St. Vale gave up the request, for he would not betray her.

Having expected to be picked up by some vessel in a day or two, the long-boat had only carried a week's provisions, and in fact the schooner's stores had been very meager, and consequently the last cracker was consumed and yet no succor came.

And thus it continued until death claimed one of their number, for a captive, never very strong, had succumbed to hunger and exposure, and was coolly tossed into the sea, while a voice forward muttered:

"Who next?"

All started and gazed upon the questioner.

It was Frank, white, hollow-eyed, haggard, and suffering, until St. Vale feared that her mind would go.

And thus it went on, until all became hopeless, excepting that stern, silent man who now constantly sat at the helm, and kept the crew at work to keep their brains from plotting mischief, for he saw that hunger was driving them mad.

Through tempest and sunshine, night and day, and at last in calm, went the long-boat, until one night when each man in that boat had begun to hate the others, came the scene that is the prologue to this story, and one of the thirteen survivors sprung into the sea.

That one was the poor woman known as Frank, who had lived for revenge upon one who had cruelly wronged her, herded with pirates, and dropped the garb of her sex to hunt to death the Black Pirate.

When she had proposed the one to die by lot, and thus destroy the unlucky number of thirteen in the boat, and saw that that lot fell upon St. Vale, the reader will remember how she, still believed to be a man by all except the lieutenant, sprung into the sea and disappeared from sight in its dark depths.

And hardly had the waters closed over her form than the sail was sighted and found to be a weird craft, cruising the seas with the ghastly forms swinging in the rigging.

And that craft was the Petrel, which had become known to many as the gallows-ship.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CHASED BY DEATH.

THE Black Pirate was not disappointed in his anticipations of reaping a rich harvest from the freighted merchant-ships coming out of the larger ports of the United States, from Portland to Norfolk.

He had taken a number of prizes, and several he had put crews on board and sent to his island retreat, while a schooner-of-war that had attacked him, he had sunk with all on board, and escaped capture by several large American cruisers, through his skill and daring.

Each day his name was becoming more noted as the most deperate and cruel pirate that had ever been known, and vessels-of-war under all flags were hoping to capture him.

Defying pursuit, gloating in his morbid nature and cruelties, the huge Black Chief sat in his luxuriously-furnished cabin one pleasant evening, surrounded by the spoils of a hundred captures, and counting over his treasures, while on either side of him was ranged the skeleton forms of his victims.

It was a starlit night, and the wind was blowing fresh; but the brigantine was not running very fast, as her foremast, in her action with the schooner, had been cut off a few feet by a solid shot, and the repairs made were only temporary until a new stick could be put in at the island, for which place the pirate craft was then heading.

"Senor chief, there is a sail in sight!" called out an officer down the companionway.

"If she is a slow sailer and a prize, head for her, as we may get another rich haul, Mantanzas; but if she looks armed give her a wide berth, as the brigantine is not herself, you know," replied the Black Pirate, continuing the counting of his gold and jewels.

But in twenty minutes Mantanzas returned to the cabin, saying that the stranger had sighted them, changed his course, and was coming directly after them.

"Then he's armed and wants a fight, and in our crippled state we must fly."

Again the officer returned to the deck, and the chief returned to the joyous work of going over his ill-gotten treasure.

But once more he was disturbed.

"Senor captain, that craft is gaining, and it looks strangely like the—"

"The what, Mantanzas?" was the calm question, as the lieutenant paused.

"The Petrel!"

"What?"

"The one they call the gallows-ship, senor."

"Good God! the king's cruiser that we made a gallows-ship of?"

"Yes, senor."

"And in pursuit?"

"Yes, senor."

Instantly the Black Chief left his treasure and rushed upon deck.

He found the brigantine going along under all the canvas she could bear in her crippled rig, and under pressure of a ten-knot breeze, while astern half a league came a vessel evidently in chase.

The eyes of every one of the crew were fixed upon the stranger, and no wonder, for even the casual glance showed that it was the Petrel.

Though only a starlit night, the coming vessel yet seemed surrounded with a halo, a pale greenish light, that revealed the tracery of the rigging faintly, and the ghastly forms swinging in the rigging.

She had just the canvas set that had been on her when the Black Pirate had set her adrift, and was certainly a queer-looking craft to be in chase of another.

"Her rudder has got jammed, and that holds her on her course," said the Black Pirate, as if trying to find relief in what he knew was impossible.

"A change of course will determine that, senor," said an officer.

"Then put the brigantine on the starboard tack."

At once the order was obeyed, and as the brigantine went round the stranger held on.

"Ha! I told you so, for she does not follow our example," cried the Black Pirate, in delight.

But the joy of all was short-lived, for, when reaching the very spot where the brigantine went in stays, the death-ship followed suit, and came dashing along on the starboard tack, exactly in the wake, and steadily gaining upon the pirate.

"Damnation! she follows our wake like a

hound on a trail," said the Black Pirate, savagely.

As he saw that the death-ship was still steadily gaining he called to his men to clear the stern guns and to open upon the strange craft.

To a man they refused, and, unwilling to raise mutiny there, the Black Pirate himself swung the port stern gun round, sighted it carefully and fired.

But not the slightest effect was visible upon the death-ship, although the ball seemed to go through the rigging.

Again and again was the gun fired, and with no effect that could be noticed upon the brigantine, and with a superstitious horror creeping over him the Black Pirate ceased firing.

Full of superstition himself, and by it, and his grim skeletons, curses and weird acts, holding fearful influence over his crew, the Black Pirate, now that he was face to face with something of the supernatural, was deeply moved, and called out:

"A hundred onzas to the man that discovers a live human being upon that vessel."

Every eye was now riveted upon the death-ship, and yet not one could see a moving form.

"Land ho!"

The voice came from the maintop of the brigantine, and a long dark line had opened ahead which the Black Pirate knew was the North Carolina coast.

He had hoped he was further off from the shore, and now saw that the death-ship was to windward, and if it increased its speed could head him off.

Still he determined to make a desperate effort to get away, even if he carried away his masts.

"Up into the rigging, you devils, and set every inch of cloth the brigantine can dress in."

"Never mind the weak stick, crowd on the canvas, I say!" yelled the Black Pirate.

The wind was now increasing and though the men feared for the result, they sprung to obey; but as they swarmed into the rigging, a cry broke from Mantanzas, and every eye was turned upon the death ship.

In her rigging suddenly appeared a number of white forms, strangely ghostly in appearance, and instantly more sail was spread on her, as if by magic. Every man on the brigantine, at this sight turned deadly pale, for at last they felt that punishment for their red crimes was pursuing them.

Even the Black Chief, whom no one ever had known to feel fear, or at least to show it, trembled violently, and his voice quivered, as he cried:

"Helmsman, put her dead before the wind for the shore."

Instantly the sheet halyards were let fly, and square before the half-gale that was blowing, the brigantine started for the shore.

Following steadily in her wake, until reaching the spot where the brigantine squared away, the death-ship held on the same course, and a groan came from every man on the pirate craft, for they gave themselves up as doomed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DOOMED.

THAT the death-ship was gaining quickly upon the pirate the most casual observer upon the brigantine could see, and that the former was a supernatural foe, sent after them in punishment for their crimes, even the cruel chief felt was true.

Nervously he paced the deck, almost fearful of looking at the strange craft in his wake, and the ghastly forms which he had tied in the rigging, and yet casting furtive glances at it, which gave him each time less hope, as the brig was now within half of a mile, and the sickly green light which pervaded, rather than shone from it, displayed its ghastliness in all its horror.

About the decks, since the extra sail had been set, were visible forms in pure white, moving solemnly to and fro, and they but added terror to the hearts of the pirates.

"There is a bar yonder which I know has an inlet through, Mantanzas, but we can only get through at high tide, and it is yet an hour away, according to my reckoning; but we must attempt it, and if we fail there is but one course to pursue."

"And that course is, chief?"

"To spring into the sea."

"How far is the land away from the bar?"

"A league or more."

"Then we spring to our death?"

"It is better so, than to have the clammy

touch of those fellows laid upon us, Mantanzas."

The lieutenant shuddered and made no reply, and taking his bearings, from objects on shore, the Black Pirate headed for the inlet.

Nearer and nearer drew the death-ship, and nearer drew the brigantine to the shore, until suddenly the Black Pirate called out:

"I am wrong, for yonder is not the clump of trees I formerly steered by, but they are further up the coast; ready, about!"

But, as the brigantine's bow swung round there came a sudden thump, she careened over, a shriek followed, and she was hard aground upon a sand-bar, while the waves breaking over her deck, and her keeling over so suddenly, hurled the crew into the wild waves.

There were shrieks from many, and yet not one felt like struggling to reach her decks again, as they beheld the death-ship coming directly for them.

The Black Chief, with his crew, had been hurled into the foaming waters, and with the others he felt that he must die, for the waves were dragging them along at a fearful rate, and land and sky and hope seemed shut out of gaze forevermore, for who could live in that maelstrom of waters, with the land yet miles away?

Running close in to the stranded brigantine, the death-ship stood off and on for a few minutes, and then suddenly into her rigging went white forms, and her sails were rapidly taken in, and she was stripped to meet a furious storm which had suddenly loomed up over the pine forest on shore, and was driven seaward.

And as suddenly had the stiff sea breeze that had been blowing died out, and with her bow pointed to meet the coming gale, the death-ship let fall her anchors, a boat left her side, and ten minutes after half a dozen white forms were on board the brigantine.

A moment after the storm came sweeping seaward, the wall of water pushed before it raised the brigantine upon its top and bore it off the bar, and then it was seen to suddenly be under control of its helm, for it luffed sharply round, its head to the gale, its anchors were let fall, and it too lay quietly riding out the gale, and not a cable's length from the death ship.

CHAPTER XXXVI. ST. VALE'S PLOT.

WHEN Leon St. Vale had backed off so suddenly from the gallows-ship, as the weird craft was also called, it was with the impulse of horror that momentarily pervaded him, and the idea that had gone abroad among seamen that all meeting the ghostly craft were doomed to die.

But an instant of reflection showed him that if her crew were all dead he had nothing to fear from the craft, while the storm that was rushing upon them gave him every cause for anxiety.

"Give way, men! pull hard for the vessel," he cried.

The men demurred when he continued:

"That gale will swamp us, and on yonder craft we can meet nothing more than death."

"Give way, I say."

The long-boat moved forward once more, was guided alongside the brig, and Leon St. Vale sprang on board.

"Lively, lads, for here is a haven in the stern," he called out cheerily, and inspired by his manner all sprang to obey.

Lena La Rue was first aided on board, then came the others, and the crew sprang to obey orders to get the vessel's head to the gale, and the long-boat was cast adrift.

Then came the tempest, raising the brig high upon its rolling waters, and causing the ghastly forms in its rigging to swing wildly about.

But Leon St. Vale commanded his crew to stand at their posts, the brig was laid to, and there lay until the storm was ridden out.

By dawn the seas were no longer in a wild chaos, and St. Vale took a look at his capture.

He found that the stores on board remained intact, although the vessel had been robbed by the Black Pirates of such light articles of value as the vile crew could hastily carry off.

The dead and wounded left on the decks had been washed overboard; but in the rigging swung a score of forms, hideous emblems of the capture of the Petrel by the pirates.

But in the cabin was a surprise that gave Leon St. Vale great pleasure, for there in his

own state-room lay wounded Captain Cuthbert, and upon the floor near was a seaman, also suffering from a wound.

The leg of the captain had been broken by a bullet, the arm of the seaman had been shattered, but they had recovered consciousness after the departure of the pirates to find that they alone were left of the gallant crew, and together they had aided each other as best they could while the vessel drifted aimlessly about the seas.

It was a fearful story of horror and suffering which Captain Cuthbert had to tell; but he almost wept with joy at his rescue, and one of the captives of the pirates being a surgeon, his wound and that of the seaman at once received the needed attention.

Then St. Vale told of a plot he had formed to make the gallows-ship serve as a means of punishing the Black Pirate and his crew, and Captain Cuthbert and the passengers readily agreed to it.

Making himself known to the pirates in his true light, St. Vale promised them full pardon if they aided him and instant death if they declined, and they saw that he meant what he said, while, being armed, and with not only the two male captives, but also Lena La Rue and the wounded seaman of the Petrel standing at his back with weapons to aid him, the eight pirates gladly consented to obey him if he would give them a written guarantee of pardon for their past offenses.

This St. Vale did, and by night all the Petrel was ready for her cruise under her new commander.

To prepare her for this voyage, St. Vale had just cut down the bodies in the rigging and given them proper burial, after which lay figures were swung up in their place.

Then the tattered sails had been replaced by others found on board, and lanterns, with reflectors of green glass, had been so arranged as to throw light upon the rigging, and give the vessel a most supernatural look.

When all was in readiness the Petrel was put on the hunt for the Black Pirate, St. Vale knowing in what locality he would find him, and if missing him intending to sail directly for the island where he felt certain to meet him.

The reader has already seen the result of St. Vale's plot, and that the Black Pirate and his crew had been driven to doom by their own superstitious terror at beholding the death-ship in pursuit of them.

When the morning dawned the sea had run down sufficiently for the Petrel to range alongside of the brigantine, and then the captors beheld the result of their capture, for the brigantine had been wholly deserted by her red crew, and the treasures, for which so much innocent blood had been shed, lay scattered in confusion about the cabin floor, not even the Black Pirate remembering his gold and jewels in his terror.

As St. Vale was in a quandary what to do with his two vessels, for he feared to trust the pirate crew, a sail suddenly hove in sight, and a cry of joy broke from his lips as he turned his glass upon the stranger and recognized the Vulture.

Laying in under the shore, and with the Vulture a long way off, he feared they would not be seen from her decks, and instantly gave orders to fire heavy guns as a signal.

The scowling looks of his pirate crew, as they obeyed the order, showed that he had not mistrusted them without cause, for they had already planned to seize the vessels and head for the island with them, where they could soon man them with crews from the ports of the Carribee Islands.

But now they dared not make the attempt, as the Vulture might sight them, and all would be lost.

Sullenly they fired the guns, the reports reached the ears of those on the brig-of-war, and soon after she came treading toward the two vessels as they lay at anchor.

To picture the surprise and joy of all on board the Vulture would be impossible, when they discovered that Leon St. Vale was in command of both vessels.

No, there was one exception to the general delight, and that one was Lieutenant Kent Lomax, for he believed he would now have it all his own way, as he had already set going again the insinuations that Leon St. Vale had turned pirate, and not meeting him, as promised, off the Bermudas, with constant hints of the easy way in which he had been captured,

had even caused Sir Roslyn, and especially Lord Cecil to begin to doubt the young officer too.

But now the secret was out, he had redeemed himself, and won fame as the destroyer of the Black Pirate, and the captor of his brigantine, besides solving the secret of the death-ship, and the world would unite in singing his praises, while, what was bitterness to the heart and soul of Kent Lomax, Lady Eve Alstone, and even Sir Grey, would welcome the victor, after the dangers he had known and triumphs he had won, not to speak of the riches the pirate vessel would bring.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONCLUSION.

ONE balmy afternoon the town of Halifax was startled by the forts thundering forth salutes, and hastening to the look-outs, the citizens beheld three vessels coming up the harbor.

The leading craft was the Petrel, better known along the coast as the death-ship, or gallows-ship, and to the distant observer the lay figures still hanging in the rigging looked indeed like human forms.

Behind her came the well-known brigantine of the Black Pirate, and following in their wake was the Vulture.

"The Vulture brig-of-war has captured the pirate and brought in the gallows-ship," cried Sir Grey Alstone to his daughter, for, seated in their carriage, they were among the observers of the incoming vessels.

This remark of Sir Grey Alstone was seized upon by the crowd, and it went from lip to lip.

But when the three vessels dropped anchor, and boats put off from them for the shore, it soon became known that Leon St. Vale was the victor, and his name was shouted over the town until the shouters were hoarse.

And up at the elegant mansion of Sir Grey were assembled the dignitaries of the town, to greet Sir Roslyn Stannix, Captain Cuthbert, whose wound had so far recovered as to enable him to go on crutches, Leon St. Vale, the hero, Lord Cecil Milnor, the two captive gentlemen, and last, by no means least, Lena La Rue, whom Lady Eve had welcomed most kindly and made her guest.

And ere many days rumor flew around that Leon St. Vale was to take command of the Petrel, late the gallows-ship, as Captain Cuthbert would retire from the navy, and that his first officer was to be Lord Cecil Milnor.

But it was also rumored that before they sailed on a cruise to continue the good work of driving piracy from the high seas, that Lieutenant Leon St. Vale was to lead to the altar Lady Eve Alstone, while it was to be a double wedding, as Lord Cecil Milnor would marry Lena La Rue, the pirate's captive, and a New York beauty and heiress.

But, whether rumor was true, and true love ran smoothly in these cases, is told in the sequel to this romance, "The Ocean Vampire; or, The Heiress of Castle Curse."

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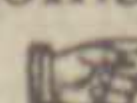
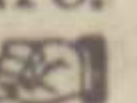
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